DEVELOPING A MINISTRY MODEL FOR YOUNG ADULT RE-ENGAGEMENT BACK INTO THE LOCAL CHURCH

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ABSTRACT

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by
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The context is Christ Community United Methodist Church in Jennings, Missouri. The problem is young adults are disengaged from church. The hypothesis is if the lay leadership and young adults attend a six-week seminar, then they will be empowered to develop discipleship programming that re-engages young adults. The hypothesis was tested utilizing a qualitative research methodology with nine participants. Data was collected utilizing pre- and post-test questionnaires, focused journaling, a spiritual gifts assessment, and focus group discussions. The results revealed the group was empowered, gained new sensitivity toward disengagement factors, and viable new strategies were embraced.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my beloved mother, Elno Mae Lee McClendon McDonald, who showed my brother, Marshall D. McClendon, Jr., and me what it means to have a lifelong relationship with Jesus Christ, and how to present thyself as a living sacrifice unto God's service. It was her faith in God, tenacious role modeling, and resilience that led me to be a servant leader in the church. I also want to dedicate this labor of love to my husband, Rev. Dr. K. Llewellyn McGhee, and our son, Christian Xavier McClendon McGhee, for their prayers, collective insights, and support throughout the journey.

ABBREVIATIONS

AME	AME African Methodist Episcopal
CCC	Christ Community Church
CME	Christian Methodist Episcopal
NIV	New International Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
PT	Practical Theology
UMC	United Methodist Church
UMCBOD	United Methodist Church Book of Discipline
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association

Deliver us from the tempests of our inward churnings. Calm our spirits with Thy great tranquilities, that we may be total instruments in Thy hands to serve Thy purposes and share in Thy work in the world. Let us be transparent, that Thy Light may not be dimmed in us and through us no darkness may come to those who trust we have and whose hands are in our hands. These are the words; behind them are the urgencies of the heart. Let the words and the urgencies be a living sacrament placed upon Thy altar even as did our Master.

—Howard Thurman, *The Centering Moment*

INTRODUCTION

Many people hear a variety of calls from God summoning them to serve in varied capacities, and they become co-laborers in making disciples and transforming the world. Yet, our minds may become inundated with all kinds of questions and wonderings. These include: “What is God calling me to do?” “What can I offer God?” “Do I have any spiritual gifts like others?” We may even feel we cannot measure up to the tasks at hand.” These are just a few things that can hinder our acceptance, future engagement in the call to Christian leadership, and spiritual maturity. Not to mention that if we accept the task, who will be there to help us, guide us, encourage us, and keep us from disengaging as young adult leaders of the church. We must hold in our hearts this biblical truth, “that we are God’s masterpiece, created in Christ Jesus for good works,” as stated in Ephesians 2:10. Additionally, we must remember that we are vessels to be used for God’s purposes and glory.

In my own spiritual journey, I was blessed to have a parent, a family heritage of church leaders, church teachers, and mentors to keep me engaged in all kinds of fruitful works in the church. However, in today’s church culture, this is not always the case. We are faced with a decline in young adult’s attendance and participation in the local church. But how does the church continue to learn, evolve, and lean into new paradigms to address this consistent problem? It was through the work of my own spiritual autobiography that I was able to see that the problem of disengagement of this age group

is multi-layered and complex. The solution will not be a quick fix, but we can begin to find new tools, strategies, and models for re-engaging young adults. The seminary's intensives, mid-year class gatherings, and cohort focus groups allowed me to learn about new emerging models for reaching this demographic while listening to my mentors and colleagues discuss their own contexts and what has been meaningful to them in this area. In listening to these models and traveling to see fresh models, I came to see that I was an example and product of the type of models they presented. It confirmed for me just how much God and the church shaped me into a young emerging leader over forty-six years ago and provided me with my first opportunity to teach Sunday School class at the age of eleven. It was from this point that I became embolden, empowered to learn, and studied God's word. I began to speak more, thus becoming fully engaged in the life of my church. And through all of this, I was kept protected and resilient during several challenges in my life. It was my growth as a young Christian leader that helped me to further the call to full-time ordained ministry. Then, twenty-four years later enroll, I enrolled at United Theological Seminary to pursue my Doctor of Ministry degree to become a doctor of the church.

In chapter one, Ministry Focus, the topic for my dissertation was revealed through the synthesis of my spiritual autobiography and contextual analysis papers. My intersection was found in my teaching as a young leader of the church and that love blossomed and evolved into me co-laboring with God in aspects of church discipleship and ministry. I taught class, served in young adult boards, presented at annual conferences, chaired annual church programs, and served on administrative boards of the local church. However, there were several factors that could have led to my

disengagement, but it was those prominent role models, faithful teachers, and parents whom I emulated that enabled me to continue. Yet, in my context and in so many other congregations, young adults have disengaged. In addition to this, I noticed that the leaders, mentors, and relevant programming is not always available nor are the helpers and budgetary resources, and this led me to believe that this could be one of the factors that have led to young adults' disengagement in our churches. However, I was one of the persistent young adults who stayed engaged throughout my life cycle. This intersection of young adults leading in the church, having a strong foundation, being recognized as a co-laborers with God, and utilizing their gifts, is paramount if we want to find viable solutions. There were connections, yet dualities that presented two different worlds of church ministry for young adult leaders. But perhaps we can look at the past practices and today's emerging models in order to find relevant solutions and practices to aid in today's problem of young adults' disengagement. These dualities that are enlightened in my Ministry Focus chapter are: providing young adults with leadership opportunities versus no opportunity to lead. Being fully engaged versus there is nothing relevant to engage in. Having role models and mentors versus not having these critical people present. Structured living and principles versus having no structured or principled living. All these revelations led me to my problem statement and hypothesis in my context. My problem statement is that young adults have disengaged from the church. My hypothesis is that "if the lay leadership and young adults could attend a six-week seminar on reengagement of young adults (eighteen through twenty-seven), then they will be empowered to develop a ministry model for young adult re-engagement." It is with this focus that I began to dig deep and begin my dissertation work.

In chapter two, Biblical Foundations, I lean into the strong ministry role model of the Apostle Paul's relationship with a very promising young leader — Timothy. They become acquainted in the Book of Acts chapter sixteen, and a tenacious Paul reclaims a young Timothy to join him in ministry as a co-laborer in God's mission to the Gentiles. It is through their beloved relationship of mentor to protégé and spiritual father to spiritual son that teaching, modeling, correction, emulating, and encouragement that the young leader spiritually matures throughout the Books of First Timothy and Second Timothy. The biblical grounding for my project is further elucidated in the text of Second Timothy 3:1-17. The undergirding verses are verses fourteen and fifteen when Paul encourages a young Timothy "to continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from who you learned it, and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (NRSV).

Not only does Apostle Paul reclaim this young leader Timothy but he also calls him to remember his spiritual heritage, foundation, and the laying on of hands. This guiding biblical text serves dual purposes: it undergirds the claim that engagement is critical for us to be used as a vessel who are also co-laborers with Christ. Secondly, it serves as a model and strategy to implement in the discipleship programming to re-engage and retain young adults in the local church.

In chapter three, Historical Foundations, through the lens of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and its founder George Williams, we view a time in our historical backdrop when young men had disengaged from fruitful and righteous living and took to the streets, homelessness, and drinking in the taverns because they were forgotten about as the times and the culture changed during the Industrial Era. Yet,

George Williams in London, England, paved the way for this model of ministry that focused on young men's re-engagement that included Christian principles, structured events, mentorship, and feedback with other Christian men that inspired these young men and changed the trajectory of their lives. It also re-engaged them in their faith and led to wholesome living. The YMCA today has evolved to focus on everyone in the family unit, not just young adult boys and older men. There are lessons and strategies that can be learned from this model of re-engagement and life transformation.

In chapter four, Theological Foundations, the problem can be addressed by applying the theological frameworks of ecclesiology and practical theology (PT) to re-examine the church's beliefs about its role and function in the world and how they build discipleship programs for young adults. Practical theology provides a methodology on how to arrive at a new ministry model that develops a new praxis to find solutions and strategies to the problems of disengagement which includes reclaiming young adults, calling them to remember their foundation and rich spiritual heritage, and meeting with them to assist the congregation in developing the new discipleship programming that has multiple entry points for re-engagement.

In chapter five, Interdisciplinary Foundations, the field of sociology was consulted as a means of bridging the gap between the problem statement and hypothesis by showing that the usage of social learning theory could seek to serve as a resource and method to employ as we discover what the underlying factors are for disengagement. Social learning theory proves that one's context, role models, conversation and feedback, and reinforcement of reward and punishment all serve as powerful forces as to whether a behavior is copied and emulated as meaningful in one life. So, Albert Bandura's theory

has been proven to influence behavior throughout all stages of one's life, not just in the formative years. Therefore, this theory was implemented into the research model of young adult re-engagement and will be used in the new discipleship programming to re-engage young adults.

In chapter six, Project Analysis, a six -week seminar research project was implemented to test the hypothesis: "if the lay leadership and the young adults attend a six-week seminar on re-engagement of young adults (eighteen through twenty-seven) back into the local church, then they will be empowered to develop a ministry model for young adult re-engagement." This research project had eleven subjects initially but ended up with nine participants who engaged in learnings and lectures. There were four data points utilized to test and evaluate the change in behavior and perspectives. These were pre- and post-test questionnaires, focus group discussions, a spiritual gifts assessment, and focused journaling. Through the research project and the results, I was able to see that there was a newfound sensitivity to the reasons why young adults had disengaged; there was a greater awareness that a new model was needed to engage the young adults of today and new models of re-engagement were embraced.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

One of our greatest blessings in the world are children. They are born into the world innocent, vulnerable, impressionable, and gifted. Parents, pastors, mentors, and counselors encourage them to reach for life's best, and eventually they mature and seek to understand what life is about. They fill our schools, churches, workplaces, sports games, and creative arts programs. Young people are creative, especially this new digital-millennial generation. Not to mention they are created in the Image of God, so they are children of God, therefore; they all matter. Each one of them are given various spiritual gifts, a divine purpose, and are uniquely capable of transforming this world for better. Yet, I have noticed within the church and community that all young people are not always provided access or opportunities to be challenged, creative, or utilize their own self-expressions. Moreover, if there are no places of sharing their very transparent stories of growth, trauma, celebration, and struggles then where does all of this get processed and dealt with by young people. If they no longer feel a since of belonging or there is no connection within their church's programming as they grow spiritually in the church, many disengage. Not to mention, if they are no longer receiving affirmation, encouragement, or reward for their growth, then who provides this for them? If there is no solid spiritual foundation to ground them, how will they navigate through life. I have

observed through conversations and behaviors at the congregation's Summer Camp for all ages that without these things one's mental, physical, and spiritual development is hindered. Moreover, one often loses interest in the church and stops going altogether.

The church is often unable to control what happens in a young adult's home or social context from day to day. For example, like the cyclical issues in their community that deeply impact them and their religious choices, but we can provide a safe structured place to learn spiritual foundational principles, observe right attitudes and behaviors and be given tools for living a resilient life. This in turn changes the trajectory of one's life from childhood through young adult age.

This synergy paper will provide an avenue to intersect my spiritual foundation of the church that transformed my character and quality of life. It is evident in my Spiritual Autobiography Paper, that I experienced various types of traumas (witnessed abuse, alcoholism, divorce, abandonment by our father) as a child, but there were key elements that were laid upon this strong foundation that led to my resilience and continual engagement in the local church from childhood to young adulthood. These critical elements were sharing my story; developing a constructive outlet when trauma and anxiety are present; engaging personal relationship and guidance from church leaders and pastors; an inherent sense of belonging and worth; a stable support system that includes affirmation; a place to put my hands to doing something that was bigger than me. Although, it was not evident to me while I was growing up, that these were the things that kept me engaged in the church and deeply grounded my consistent faith.

This synergy paper will become the backdrop for my Doctor of Ministry project that will address the persistent problem of why young adult who were baptized as

children then attended youth development classes, and were active in the total life of church have disengaged as young adults? My hypothesis is this: that if we can identify the factors that have led to disengagement of these young adults (between eighteen and twenty-six years of age) then we can utilize this information to design a meaningful young adult program that will bring about new insight and awareness to the laity and leadership of the church. This newfound awareness and valued insight will then lead to the young adult re-engaging and continuing their future discipleship in new ways.

We hear news reports of young people cutting themselves as a form of release from stress, dropping out of school, the anxiety and trauma of COVID – 19, continually dying due to gun violence, committing suicide, mental health is on the rise, and systemic racism and injustice are at an all-time high. It is evident that are young adults are being bombarded with all kinds of issues, perhaps these are the main reasons why young adults have disengaged. However, I would not want to guess, I would like to establish a rapport with these young adults, dialogue, and then assess what are the identifying factors that lead to their disengagement. Furthermore, many churches, schools, and community agencies are wondering what is going on with our young adults, and why are there so many shootings in all our major cities? I don't want to just keep wondering or doing irrelevant church programs that don't address the needs, I would like to engage our young adults and collaborate to develop a ministry model that is effective in all church and across denominational lines. Although my trauma may not resemble their issues or reasons for disengagement, it would be transformative if the church could play a major role in reviving and re-engaging this group back into the life of the church. Moreover, it is clear to me that if we expect to have a vital millennial generation in the church to carry

on, and build a better world literally and figuratively, the Church must find effective ministry methods and build relevant ministry models. I am confident because of my own foundation in the church that we can effectively assist our young adults by giving them relevant ministry options that can teach them tools for life.

Context

As I review my contextual analysis paper, it's evident that both entities (the church and the Jennings Community) want to engage the young people because they realize there is a desperate need throughout the world to support young people as they are bombarded with systemic issues that affect their growth and spiritual development. The demographics of Jennings is 88% African American and 25% of the community are on SNAP (Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program) so there is food insecurity which correlates to a child not being secure about where their next meal will come from which leads to poor concentration, physical health issues, self-esteem, socialization issues, and mental well-being, Secondly, 19% of the population lives in poverty, and this often creates a cycle of poverty that is not easily broken and may lend itself to homelessness. Third, 59.9% of the population are renters and this contribute to feelings of instability when a family faces crisis leading to families being evicted. This causes a disruption to their continuum of education, their circle of friends, and the structured lifestyle which they are accustomed to living. Not to mention, if they are unable to find adequate housing quickly in the Jennings area many must move to another municipality or even the city of St. Louis and this further disrupts their life. Fourth, 36.3% of the young people live in single parent households and 15.6 % of residents are married with

children. This means that over a third of our children may not have a father/male figure to relate to or raise them. Fifth, the 2021 FBI Crime Rates for Jennings show that the highest crimes are violent and property crimes-70.5 and 71.2 on a rating scale of 1 to 100-1 being the lowest and 100 being the highest. These figures are just a little lower than the city of St. Louis whose rates are 86.8 and 85.1 respectively. Knowing these crimes rates, the church and the community are very aware that we must find more viable options. Yet both struggle with human resources and sustained funding to do the most pressing work.

The congregation struggles with finding someone to develop and lead a vital young adult ministry. Currently there are five young people under the age of eighteen in the congregation and there are ten young adults who are not regular attenders, but they grew up as active participants in the life of the church. The congregation is not meeting their spiritual, mental, and physical needs (consistently) or building that strong foundation that will help to sustain them throughout life. But also, through the transition of pastors, mentors, and various programming styles, it has been challenging to gain the young adult's consistency and ongoing momentum with this group. Although the Summer Camp provides an intensive three weeks for young people between the ages of four and nineteen for those living in Jennings and other municipalities, it does not address the systemic issues some of them may be facing. At the camp, young people between the ages of four and nineteen years of age come together to learn life skills, embrace leadership skills, build communication and interpersonal skills, foster teamwork, and learn about career opportunities. Yet many of these young adults are also not involved in the Jennings Youth Commission (a commission of Jennings advocating

for youth, and they complete service projects around the area), but they are involved in extracurricular activities and sports in their schools/colleges.

The other issue with the congregation is relevancy. Because there is a generational divide between the seniors; sixty-four and older and the millennial to baby boomer generation, we often disagree on what we can do in the Church or on the property of the Church. The ideas we bring forth are very different. The older members want to do things that have always worked, whereas the young people want to do something new like a Coffee House, Mime Ministry, Creative Arts or Step Ministry. Any new ideas that come forth will have to be implemented by the young people because the sixty-four and older group have not totally given up, but they are not as effective and agile as they once were. They are now wanting to rest and allow the young people to take over. The pastor and leadership of the church have noticed these issues are not just in the church, but they also reflect the present reality in the community.

Also, within the community, the youth and young adult have asked to have a place to dance, play basketball all night, just socialize but Jennings does not have a large enough recreational center for all of this to happen. The recreation building is very small and no longer meets the demands of the young people or the city. Therefore, there must be something relevant and structured created in this community. Likewise, the community needs more of the youth and young adult living in Jennings to be engaged and more adults to volunteer to assist. When there are not enough human resources this limits the church and community's capacity to provide effective methods for reaching the youth and young adult.

The analysis also showed that there was a great need for new leaders because over half of the congregation has matured and are unable to commit to these tasks or they have health challenges. In addition to this, the younger generations are working two to three jobs and adding another responsibility is not always feasible. There is a need for young adult leadership in the church. Although, there are younger congregants they have not volunteered to hold leadership/chairperson positions in the congregation, therefore it is challenging to do young adult ministry or pass the mantle on to them if they are wanting to carry it.

Ministry Journey

My ministry journey began with Christ Community 17 years ago when I was appointed to serve this congregation by the Bishop of the Missouri Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church. During my first week at the church, I was informed by some members that they were a small church. They asked me did I come to merge the church with another church? My response to them was, "Do you want to live or die?" They responded, "We want to live!" Therefore, knowing that they were with me, I brought all my gifts to bear; administration, faith, generosity, preaching, teaching children and youth, training, and serving. I knew teaching was my strongest most relevant gift because I began teaching Sunday School at my church when I was thirteen, so I felt very comfortable whether at church, working at the University of Nebraska Omaha as an Admissions Counselor and Director of New Student Orientation with teaching and guiding young people.

Growing up in the church, I recall members in the congregation commenting, that I was a great little teacher and had the ability to explain things in a simplified manner that even a child could understand. In addition to this, I became obvious to me that I was able to help people organize and better understand masses of information so that they could fulfill their goal/project, whether it was educational, spiritual, personal, or health related. These experiences of teaching young people in church, the university, and community organizations, allowed other gifts to emerge such as the gift of administration. First, it was this enablement to understand what makes an organization function and the special ability to plan and execute procedures to accomplish the goals of the ministry. It was this gift and God's grace that allowed me to take this small church who was losing hope and give it new vision, which was simply to engage the community in innovative ways to bring about change. Secondly, I was able to see that if you want to make disciples and grow the church you must go out and meet the people and compel them to come. The other critical piece to this is that you also must have something to offer them children, youth, and young adult once they show up in the church. It was obvious to me that we often want children, youth, young adult, to attend our churches, but the current reality is that many of them do not have anything or that the current programming that is not relevant. I felt if we were going to do something that was new and transformative in the community, that we must get out the building. Therefore, we began to canvas the community, survey them about what they felt was the greatest need, and how could we help the young people in the community. What we found out from them, is that ninety percent of them felt (seventeen years ago) that we needed something for our children, youth, and young adult. From this initial survey, and the survey

completed by the previous pastor, I designed the Summer Day Camp to be a Leadership and Life Skills Camp to assist ages four to nineteen with learning about careers, basic survival, and life skills (how to cook, make better choices, financial literacy teamwork), affirmation of their selves to build their self-esteem, teamwork, and exposed them to fun places to learn how to just enjoy youth and young adult are still being discussed. The other new things we offered was an afternoon Bible Study, Community Action Board Meetings, Book Club Study, and we had Vacation Bible School. All these new ideas and initiatives allowed me to teach and equip the body of Christ for ministry.

I am passionate about young adult programming because I can remember how my own life changed for the better when I became active in church and community programs and how my continual engagement allowed me to be shaped by God. Not to mention, I also learned more about God. I was able to see through the teaching that God was the great shepherd who would protect, care, always be faithful, and never leave me nor forsake me. Through the communal life of the church, I was exposed to a whole new world of opportunities, it allowed me to dream even more and become who I am today despite the issues of growing up in a single parent household. Also, I'm compelled to help because I do feel I am my brother's keeper. Not to mention my story and the Jennings demographic profile of the community represents me and my early life. Which could have been very different had I had not figured out some tools and had faithful mentors along the journey.

As I continued to grow professionally at the University, I decided to enroll in graduate school and work toward a Master of Public Administration, because I came to understand that many of the young people that I was talking to would say, "I am a first-

generation College student." This meant they were the first one's in their family line to ever attend college. This was not only changing their life's trajectory but changing the family story. Although they were achieving this great milestone many of them would share the trauma, the struggle they had made to just make it to the age of 18, and now many of them were the shining stars of their family. I always listened to their story, but I began to understand that there was government funding, policies, municipal governments that affect our entire way of being in the world, so I wanted to learn how to better impact my community by providing funding streams like grants, foundations, 501 c 3 not for profits. The Master of Public Administration allowed me to peek behind the scenes of what happens in municipal government and learn how we can change governmental policies to enrich people's lives over time by shifting money and programing to benefit the most vulnerable. So, I have been able to use these skills to educate my congregation on different revenue streams that can help us to do our youth mission and church vision. Through this degree and skill set we have secured two major grants (Ferguson First, Gateway Board for Mission & Growth) that have helped us to facilitate our camp and an administer an anti-bullying program that was part of the camp many years ago. When I was thirteen years old and accepted that first assignment to work in the church. I didn't know that saying yes was deeply rooted in the spiritual gift of service and teaching.

The Institute in Basic Life Principles, states that "a server's" basic motivational drive is to demonstrate love by meeting practical needs. A server is diligent and willing to sacrifice his time and energy to complete a task." The Institute also affirms that servers are affirmed by completing tasks, they like doing tangible work, they can do the

tasks themselves and they really prefer it this way, and they are the ones you see doing the menial work and looking for opportunities to assist. I lift this gift because it is the essence of who I am and how I present myself to my family, my church, my young people, and the world. Although I am the Pastor, I help in every aspect of my church from cleaning the floor to taking temperatures for Sunday Worship. I take joy in seeing tasks completed and bring joy to people's lives. More importantly, I feel hard pressed and believe that in today's world we must humble ourselves and look out in the world and serve. The gift of service has allowed me to stay in the ministry despite the challenges of ministry, denominational differences, because the call to serve is always there. I am all in. This same mindset will be needed in working with young people throughout their process of transformation.

Lastly, since I have overcome traumas and am living a dramatically different life than (for the better) the one, I grew up in. I want to reach back because I needed help, but at that time there were not services for young people like there are today. I have a shared experience with my young people, and I bring this with me no matter what I am doing in my life. My heart is truly for those hanging on the fringes of life. If they have dealt with what I have encountered or more, I don't want them to lose hope. I want them to always choose life, learn how to assert themselves in constructive ways, and navigate in this challenging world. I am also drawn to the youth and young adult because I see myself in many of them. When, my Summer Camp participants arrive disheveled and just want to be left alone, I easily understood, because I could recall my own personal moments.

Yet, I must admit it's wonderful to see that same young person by day come out of that disposition and be anxious to participate with the group. The keys that brought me through moments of childhood trauma and adult mishaps and wonderings from college were that solid spiritual foundation that I could always go back to. The second key was a support system - my village of people loved me and cheered me on. This group was my biological family, church, surrogate (play) families I had met along the way, teachers that had journey with me across the years, and dear friends. The third key was exposure to other experiences than my social context. I enjoyed learning about new things and places. Not only the things in my culture but creative arts (singing, dancing, theater, opera, symphony) books and traveling. When I was in the Salem Stepping Saints Drill Team, I traveled throughout the United States. The fourth key was testimony and affirmation. This key was critical for me, and it was in active throughout my life but especially at Church in my Sunday School Class, Youth Ministry, at every Sunday Dinner with my mother and brother, and later in the jobs I held. Testimony allows one to share their story that is unique to them. It may encourage another person in some way, and it may also let someone know that they are not alone in their struggle or that celebration. It opens the room for anyone to join in the conversation and speak from their heart. The last key was conflict resolution. This key allowed me to look within myself to see how I was affecting others when there were conflicts and not be afraid to find resolution. And rarely does fighting lead to an answer to a problem or differences in opinion. I learned to see the views of others and to arrive at a state of compromise to accomplish the goal. These keys assisted in my growth and sustainability from childhood to adulthood, and I would like to share these tools with our

young people change the trajectory of their lives for greater life fulfillment and to save some of their lives.

Develop the Synergy

As I make an analysis of how my own life and the church context converge, I can see that we have both experienced great challenges throughout our existence and had to gain skills to help us combat those growing pains and challenging experiences, that we had no control over. We both experienced losses, had to grieve, and we had to regroup and renew our visions and start over again, and in many cases without any outside support systems (like a therapist or a self-help program/ agency). I lived in a single parent home due to my father's personal issues, this impacted my life in a major way. Christ Community lost their first pastor because of the appointive process, their beloved church due to mechanical and financial issues and they had to adjust, reset, and relocate without a clear vision of what was upon the horizon. Not just one time but every time a new pastor was appointed this is often what they had to deal with. These things impacted the church life cycle in major ways, creating ministry fatigue, low morale among members, and loss of hope. When I arrived at the congregation in 2005 many members believed that I was coming there to close the church and merge it with another church. Due to this nagging narrative, the congregation developed their own strategies for dealing with this consistent reality. Even today, there are some members who still don't like getting close to the Pastor because they feel their pastor's tenure will not be long (in the itinerant system, it is a year-to-year appointment). I realize that we are not a large or wealthy church, but we have used what we had to create a fruitful and

sustainable church ministry in Jennings, Missouri. I have been their pastor for so long because I want to come back, and the congregation keeps asking for me to come back. The mission field of Jennings, Missouri has great opportunities to do life changing ministry for young adults. Also, our foundation is solid, and we understand that it is not about us, but it is about doing God's Mission. It is about making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Also, we share a common belief evidenced by what we have done with our camp; that we are outward focused and driven to help our community. And over the years we have been driven to work with the young people between the ages of 4 to 19. Teaching them at Sunday School and Vacation Bible School. Enjoying their company at the Community Christmas Party. Guiding them and providing them leadership and life skills at Summer Day Camp, or just sitting and listening to their own unique testimony (and affirming them).

The congregation and I have a shared story in that, we both had to create new models for are lives. Giving up was not an option for us. I had to begin to live life without a father. The Church had to begin to view ministry without a UMC elder and from a different lens. We both had to reimagine life and ministry anew. For the church this meant ministry would be different; revenue streams would be different; outreach ministry would be different. For me it meant that I would have to readjust life as I knew it: mom would be working more to make ends meet; there was government assistance to help supplement the income; if we wanted more things, we would have to work, mom would keep us engaged and still provide for us.

The Church and I were bound to our lives and the divine call from God because of the solid faith foundation we had built our lives upon. It was our faith in God that

kept us grounded and believing that things would get better over time. And they did get better. I have mentioned these critical pieces above because my DMIN Project will focus on developing a model for Young Adult Reengagement in the Church that provides a program that has strategy and tools that will seek to re-engage these individuals in the life of church once again. This project will also engage the young adults through dialogue and through and assessment so we may identify what are the real reasons that caused the disengagement. Thus, this will lend us to build an effective model to assist in their reengagement and further discipleship in the church. I have selected this proposed project because this persistent problem must be addressed since this age group is missing from many of our churches and the relevancy and future sustainability of the church is linked to their presence and participation. Also, knowing that young adults in Jennings are experiencing all kinds of issues in their life and they are disengaged from the community's activities, the information we gained may be useful to the commission. The project will begin with an informal gathering of a group of ten to twenty young adult between the ages of eighteen and twenty-six from the church (who are active and inactive). The purpose of this first gathering is not to ask anything of them but to build community through conversation, games, food, and the sharing of their testimony (who they are). This will be a time of observation and it will be a time of gathering and building community. Nothing will be asked of them. I would call this Phase One: The observation phase.

Secondly, I would gather this same group again, two weeks later, in Phase Two we will add another piece to the project. We will do the community building piece and once again allow for testimony and continue to build relationship. I will provide a

fifteen-minute overview of the project by simply providing them with the mission, vision, goals and expected outcomes. I will use power point and a white board to creatively present this information to them.

Thirdly, our next phase will be Phase Three: We will once again do the community building. We will explain to them that the next time that we meet which will be in one week, that we will begin the Young Adult Re-engagement Project.

Fourth, in Phase Four: We will begin the project by having them watch a video that shows them a Young Adult Ministry Program that is effective. Then we will ask them to complete a survey that deals with demographics, extra-curricular activities, struggles, church affiliation, activities you would like to do in your community, and general information about church attendance. Gathering this information will be beneficial in helping us to build our model for youth reengagement and assist us in identifying the factors influencing their disengagement and creating solutions and programs that foster change.

Although the four phases of gathering information will be over, I would like to gather the group later and build community and share with them our findings and continue to build the young adult ministry.

What I hope will come from this Doctor of Ministry Project is that we will have identified the ten things that contribute to young adult disengagement from their local church. Secondly, that we will be able to develop a ministry model for young adult reengagement that will help churches and their leadership to see why this ministry is so key to the church and offer viable programs to build a sustainable and relevant young adult reengagement model. Thirdly, this new model will provide meaningful ways for

engagement and provide a renewed since of belonging and activity of these young adults back into the church. Fourth, the leadership team will experience a sense of renewal for fresh ideas as it pertains to young adult ministry and why they are needed. Also, this information will help me to find grants and funding to be able to fund new young adult ministry programs and new models by using my Master of Public Administration to write grants so this program model may become a not-for-profit program for young adult re-engagement ministry that meets today's needs.

By hosting the event at the church this will show that we genuinely care and want young adult to come back to the church, be active, and feel that sense of belonging. It is my hope that they will see the congregation as a place of sanctuary, healing, and a place that is welcoming for everyone. I am convinced that if we don't figure out what they are needing, missing, why they disengaged from a place they once loved and were so active, or what's really going on with them, we will continue to lose many of them to their busyness, job overload, death, mass incarceration, mental illness, and despair and our churches will continue to have no young adults. Moreover, I would like to continue to build on the model by having a monthly young adult coffee house and a nine-month mentoring program that continues to lean into the factors that caused their disengagement.

Conclusion

This ministry model will seek to identify the top twenty reasons why young adults who were baptized, attended spiritual growth classes, and were active participants from childhood to youth age have now disengaged from their church. Even today we are

continuing to witness this in mainline churches. However, there are churches who have large numbers of young adults. We must begin to ask and find out what are they doing? Is there something we are not doing or that we are missing? This is the problem that is witnessed and causing issues in this local church. It is evident that there was something that kept these young adults in my context engaged and faithful to their baptismal covenants when they were younger. As I look at their records of engagement many of them sung in the choir, attended Sunday school, were a part of the church daycare and enjoyed having fun at all the young people activities. Their attendance and participation added to the growth and narrative of the church's history. So, where is the legacy of the young adult in the local church? How can the church get young adult to reengage in the life of the church because their presence and participation is vital to its sustainability and relevancy in today's world? My hypothesis is that if we can identify the reasons why the young adults disengaged from the church then I believe we can use this information to put forth a meaningful young adult reengagement program model that is impactful, aids in their renewed discipleship, and increases their participation in the local church. Furthermore, the leadership of the church will be able to be renewed about the return of the young adult and gain insight about the importance of young adult ministry and develop continual relevant and meaningful programming. Now that we have established the problem, stated our hypothesis, and listed the expected outcomes, the tentative process of implementation will be in a series of steps which the researcher and the contextual associates will follow. Our first step of this process will be what I call Dream, Dialogue, and Discovery: this step will be a time where we will meet to review the problem statement, hypothesis, and the expected outcomes of the project, and the project

plan so that everyone is on the same page before we begin our seminar sessions. This step will also include a brainstorming time to think about what secondary factors for young adult disengagement may arise from our survey and dialogue with the young adults. In addition to this these two things, we will also review and refine the timeline that is need for the total project (for instance instead of just the three summer months, we will also need two additional months for preparation). The second step will be Seminar and Information Compilation and Development this will include the gathering, compilation, and development of the pre and post surveys and the weekly seminar information to be presented. The contextual associates will help in gathering some of the information, making decisions, and assisting in presenting basic information. The third step will be Locating and Inviting our Disengaged Young Adults to come to be a part of our project. This step includes the drafting of a letter that will detail our project and answer the why, what, where, when, and how of our ministry project. The letter will also invite them to participate and a statement that states they do not have to participate. The fourth step will be the Deployment of the Project and since it will be a six-session format we will begin sometime in June. We will meet with the young adults prior to these sessions beginning.

The fifth step will be the Collection of Data and its Assessment. During this process a system of data analysis will be used to codify the responses to arrive with relevant information that will prove the hypothesis. The sixth step will be the presentation of the data to those involved and our committee. Once these six steps have been completed it is my hope that we will have viable data and new information that brings awareness and newfound insight about meaningful and relevant young adult

reengagement models. Furthermore, this model will reengage young adults into the life of the church with active participation, and the beginning of creating innovative young adult reengagement models for today's churches, and renewed meaning of the importance of young adult ministry for the leadership of the church.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

We live in a world where we are bombarded by ever changing culture shifts, new-fangled ideologies, and unexpected life challenges. This is further demonstrated by people who say, "cancel culture," or "I'm not religious, but I'm spiritual," or "I know Covid 19 kills, but I'd rather die than take a vaccine or wear a mask." How does a person deal with all that is before them, navigate the challenges of life, and seek to please God? One must have someone and something that is all powerful and transcends life; this deity is our Creator, Almighty God. God has proven himself to be loving, faithful, consistent, dependable, and will help creation endure life's journey and all its suffering. We experience growth and evolve, but one can also experience discouragement by the challenges and disruptions and give up hope. This causes many to disengage, become stagnate, and become discouraged. In the selected pericope Second Timothy 3:1-17, it is evident that Timothy had a rich spiritual heritage and was nurtured by a faithful mentor, the Apostle Paul. Timothy was set apart for pastoral work, yet he was encouraged to continue and not become discouraged as he embraced the permanence of pastoral ministry.[1] It is evident that when you are a young leader, you can become very discouraged by external forces. Some young leaders, especially

[1] George W. Knight, III, *The Pastoral Epistles,* New International Greek Testament Commentary [NIGTC] (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1992), 3, Logos Bible Software.

those who serve as pastors, may want to give up, but from this selected text, there are four components that can ground young leaders and provide them the spiritual endurance that is needed to continue the work of ministry. Paul has high standards for the younger Timothy and does not want him to be "naïve" about all the difficulties that are present in this age; therefore, he demonstrates and teaches Timothy all that is needed to become a moral and spiritually equipped pastor.[2] These components are: Christian character, emulate Apostle Paul's (mentor's) faithful example, faithful endurance despite suffering, and hold fast to the teachings of scripture for they will help you fulfill every good work.

I chose the selected pericope because it is foundational to the solution to the problem of young adult disengagement. Young adults are disengaging at alarming rates and their exit from the church has a significant impact on the church. It is evident that when they are absent from the church, their presence, voice, creative imagination, and millennial leadership leaves a void in the church and may eventually lead to the death of a church. There are several young adults who were baptized in the congregation and actively participated in all levels of the church (local, district, and conference), yet at some point they disengaged. It is evident that somewhere about the age of sixteen their church attendance became sporadic, if not earlier. What has happened to our young adults? These young adults were once very active, dedicated, and discipled in the Christian faith just like Timothy, the young pastor and apprentice of Apostle Paul. Although Timothy was older at the time of the writing of Paul's pastoral epistle, he was a young adult who was experiencing the tremendous challenges of the day. Even

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[2] Knight, III, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 7.

though Timothy might have been as old as thirty-two years, he still needed encouragement from his mentor and spiritual father to not give up but to continue.[2]

There is a correlation between Timothy's faithful service emphasizing their relational way of mentoring, observing, and modeling principles, behaviors, and moral living that resonates with components that my project will focus on in developing a ministry model for young adult re-engagement. This pericope informs my Doctor of Ministry project and the hypothesis by looking at the five central components of Timothy's spiritual journey as a younger leader. Throughout this paper I will explore the selected pericope of 2 Timothy 3: 1-17 and view how each of these components assisted Timothy in remaining steadfast, thus deciding to not give up but continue in his spiritual growth and ministry. I selected Second Timothy, one of the pastoral letters, because it gives word and prophetic revelation to the challenges many Christian leaders face, especially some young leaders who are not as experienced; they may experience the desire to leave even more because of these factors. These factors may include the competing challenges of the church and family life, the false teachers that oppose the pastor and Christian teaching, the persistent ebb and flow of navigating the administration, teaching, social justice, and preaching that one must perform. The call to be relevant in a world that is ever changing is very challenging for any pastor.

Literary Element

In reading 2 Timothy one notices that it utilizes a paraenetic literary style which is this moral exhortation that calls one to remember and to remind others of traditional

teachings that they first learned that was foundational to their daily living.[3] Moreover, Neil Elliott and Deborah Krause, in their book *The Letters and Legacy of Paul*, assert,

> As an evangelist to the gentiles and leader of churches, the historical Paul saw his letters to an end. As such, he did not think of himself as a 'letter writer.' By the second century, however, his letters (copied and redistributed) had become legendary. First and Second Timothy and Titus take their place in relation to this period of remembering and reinterpreting Paul. As such, they pose as the Pauline voice of authority about matters related to church leadership (hence the name 'Pastoral Epistles,' and they seek to define the Pauline legacy of the church in a particular direction.[4]

Yet, these pastoral epistles have governed many churches today. However, it is also a letter of encouragement and empowerment to those in church leadership and the tone of the letter is very personal, and there is a tone of urgency to continue and renew your call to ministry.

In the selected pericope, the beloved Apostle Paul is awaiting execution while writing from a prison in Rome to his beloved son in the ministry, Timothy. This young pastor will permanently take charge of the Church at Ephesus. Paul believed in training pastors and sending them out to lead the churches he founded, but they needed to be of sound character and discipline to effectively lead these newfound congregations.This is a momentous task, because Timothy will no longer be assisting the Apostle Paul in the ministry, but he will be leading and forming the new church that Paul founded on his second missionary journey.[5] Christian character is the first component that is essential for continuing this work. It is quite a task for the young Timothy, who first encountered

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[3] Knight, III, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 5.

[4] Deborah Krause, "I & II Timothy," in *The Letters and Legacy of Paul*, ed. Margaret Aymer, Cynthia Briggs Kittredge, and David Sanchez (Minneapolis, MN: 1517 Media-Fortress Press, 2016), https:// www.jstor.org/stable/j.cttib3tn6ns.20.

[5] Acts 16:1-3, NRSV.

Paul when he was sixteen years old, to be given this opportunity. Paul met Timothy in his own hometown of Lystra when he was ministering.[6] Acts 16: 1-2 states, "Paul came to Derbe and then went to Lystra, where a young disciple named Timothy lived whose mother was Jewish and a believer but whose father was Greek. The believers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. Paul wanted to take him along the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they knew his father was a Greek."[7]

Qualities and Characteristics of Timothy

It is clear at this young age that Timothy exhibited sound character, was learned in the scriptures, and was a faithful witness to the message Paul preached. Yet, Paul reminded him in Second Timothy about his trust in the Lord, his spiritual heritage, and he wanted to remind him to "fan into flames the spiritual gifts that God had placed upon him when he laid hands on him. God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline."[8] Paul was affirming Timothy's giftedness, but he was also challenging him to not be ashamed or timid when talking about the good news of the gospel or when facing opposition from others. Paul did not want Timothy to have any shame about the gospel message or about him being chained or imprisoned because of the gospel. He asserts that this suffering would further the Gospel message.

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[6] Acts 16:1-3, NRSV.

[7] Acts, 16:1-3, NRSV.

[8] 2 Timothy 1.6-7, NRSV.

Furthermore, Timothy had faced opposition because of the message he preached, his young age, and his lack of tested experience.[9] Although he knew the Gospel message that Paul preached, and that circumcision was no longer required, he followed the directions and advisement of his mentor and was circumcised. This showed the obedience and loyalty of Timothy.[10]

We learn more about Paul's belief in his son in the ministry in Second Timothy as he clearly reminds him about the prophetic words spoken about him. These words should affirm and encourage him to stand strong with confidence. Once again, he is told to hold on to his faith because it will help him as he fulfills his ministry. Also, it will help him keep his conscience clear.[11]

Character is such a key component in the pastoral letters because Paul views it as one of criteria needed to complete God's work. He rejects those who had bad character such as Jannes and Jambres.[12] He considers them bad agents, and these opponents continue to reappear throughout the Pastoral letters (1st and 2nd Timothy). Their character has proven to be fleeting, backstabbing, outright abandonment, and slanderous to the faith, but Timothy's character is not like this — nor is the Apostle Paul. It is from this stark contrast of Christian character and false teachers that Paul sets up these opposite poles of leadership as he writes.

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[9] 2 Timothy 1:5-11, NRSV.

[10] Knight, III, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 7.

[11] 1 Timothy 1:18-19, NRSV.

[12] Knight, III, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 5.

As we look at Second Timothy, it is placed between First Timothy and Titus. All these pastoral letters appear to challenge these young pastors to stand up against the false teachers which have infiltrated the church and hindered the work of the gospel. Secondly, they are expected to live exemplary lives and have strong moral conduct as they lead the church. They are to remain strong and not be influenced by the vices of their day: lovers of money, lovers of themselves, boastful and arrogant, and having a counterfeit form of faith that is void of power. These are the factors that were present as they ministered to these newfound churches that Paul formed. Paul continues this chapter by pointing to himself as that pure example to follow, and if you do this, you will be able to stand fast.

Timothy is addressed by Paul as a beloved son and servant of God. Yet, Paul admonishes his beloved son in the ministry and provides the backdrop of all that is going on and the external forces plaguing Timothy. It is evident in First and Second Timothy that "there is an intimate tone struck that prepares its readers/hearers for unfettered, trustworthy, and genuine access to Paul's thinking about the matters he is about to discuss with one whom the tradition (and Paul's historical letters) presents as one of his most trusted co-workers in the ministry, according to Elliot and Krause.[13] He informs him that they are living in the last days which we have been living in since the resurrection of Christ, and that these times will be very troubling or distressing. Paul stresses that these last days are a time of moral depravity, apostasy, and people lacking the true power of the gospel. Whereas in previous chapters Timothy was chosen to deal with these individuals with love and mercy, Paul now instructs him to be aware and run

[13] Krause, "I & II Timothy," 607-612.

from these types of people. These things listed represented the evil that was pervasive in the community and hindering the work of the gospel. This made Paul's work harder, and now Timothy would be faced with the same evils. They represent a type of character that does not represent one who is of sound character. This present age has brought on this whole plague of problems that resemble our culture today: narcissism, hedonism, greed, and consumerism. The text clearly states, "for people will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, in human, implacable, slanderers, profligates, brutes, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than of God."[14] Paul describes in detail the attitude and character of the people and the environment that young Timothy will pastor. In addition to this, Paul informs Timothy to avoid these kinds of people — those who exhibit these vices, or what Polycarp calls avarice.[15] The Pauline letters are so impactful that "a segment of them is situated within Polycarp's Letter to the Philippians where he addresses this ethical motif, avarice, and how Paul should be emulated."[16] A journal article written by Jonathon Lookadoo states that several theologians who came after Paul saw how relevant and useful his pastoral teaching were for the church and leadership, so they borrowed much of Paul's teaching from First and Second Timothy and included it in their own contexts, and they shaped it for their own application and meaning.[17] Polycarp, who came along much later than

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[14] 2 Timothy 3:2-4, NRSV.

[15] Jonathon Lookadoo, "Polycarp, Paul, and the Letters to Timothy," *Novum Testamentum* 59, Fasc. 4 (2017): 366-383, Brill, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26566508.

[16] Jonathon Lookadoo, "Polycarp, Paul, and the Letters to Timothy," Novum Testamentum 59, Fasc. 4 (2017): 366-383, Brill, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26566508.

Paul, is aware of Timothy's Christian character and devotion, but he knows that he is also young and not as experienced. Paul does not want him to fall victim to any of these external forces. This motif of avarice, wealth, and worldly riches are all unethical behaviors, and they are not becoming of one who has committed their life to God. Moreover, the spiritual father discerns that Timothy needs encouragement to face these unforeseen challenges, when he gets discouraged as evidenced by First Timothy 1:5; 1:7; 2:1, and 3:12. Timothy may be wanting to disengage from ministry because these challenges may be too much for him to endure.[17] So, Paul writes this personal letter which is a farewell discourse to his beloved son in the ministry to fight the good fight of faith and affirm him.

Furthermore, Paul stresses that Timothy has the spiritual character to fulfill the charge he has been given. Paul provides his beloved son with an example of two false teachers – Jannes and Jambres – who are not fit for this work. The epistle writer lifts these two gentlemen up as a stark contrast to Timothy's character.

> Jewish tradition holds that these names were given to the Egyptian magicians summoned by Pharaoh to oppose Moses and Aaron in Exodus 7:8-13. Yet, just as these opponents' success were short lived, so would these opponents who rejected Jesus' teachings and God's work. Jannes and Jambres were two gentlemen who were magicians and opposed Moses in the Old Testament.[18]

They would lead people astray with their false teaching, but they would also face ruin.They were corrupt, and they were "counterfeit" or not sincere in their

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[17] Jonathon Lookadoo, "Polycarp, Paul, and the Letters to Timothy," *Novum Testamentum* 59, Fasc. 4 (2017): 367, Brill, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26566508.

[18] Michael G. Sirilla, *The Ideal Bishop: Aquinas' Commentary of the Pastoral Epistles*, Catholic University of American Press, 2017, https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1kft8p2.10; https://doi.org/10.3407/j.ctt1kft8p2.

commitment to God.[19] These are obviously men who are part of the community, and they are bringing division. Therefore, he warns Timothy to stay away from them. Yet, Timothy would not be able to stay away because these false teachers are morally depraved people and were also present in the church and the community. Michael G. Sarilla notes in his writing that one is not to expel the false teachers from the church, but a prelate or pastor is to use their spiritual authority and knowledge to persuade the false teacher and unbeliever to the truth about God.[20]

In Second Timothy 3:10, Paul tells a young and inexperienced Timothy who is now in charge of Paul's beloved church, to "follow his example." This is not just to come behind or "just do as I do," but it carries a deeper meaning and weight which means to emulate what I have done.[21] Paul uses it in the sense of the "following" that takes place "with the mind" and that "understands" and "makes one's own," that which one follows, as in First Timothy 4:6. In essence, Timothy is to copy what the Apostle Paul has done. Furthermore, it means use me, (Paul), as your example of a faithful servant who has endured these sufferings. Because Timothy has known Paul since he was sixteen years old, he had seen Paul's faithful work and suffering in Lystra, Antioch, and Iconium, so he is able to identify with his mentor's faithfulness in ministry despite all the suffering Paul had endured. Timothy witnessed first-hand Paul's

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[19] Michael G. Sirilla, *The Ideal Bishop: Aquinas' Commentary of the Pastoral Epistles*, Catholic University of American Press, 2017, https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1kft8p2.10; https://doi.org/10.3407/j.ctt1kft8p2.

[20] Michael G. Sirilla, *The Ideal Bishop: Aquinas' Commentary of the Pastoral Epistles*, Catholic University of American Press, 2017, https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1kft8p2.10; https://doi.org/10.3407/j.ctt1kft8p2.

[21] Michael G. Sirilla, *The Ideal Bishop: Aquinas' Commentary of the Pastoral Epistles*, Catholic University of American Press, 2017, https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1kft8p2.10; https://doi.org/10.3407/j.ctt1kft8p2.

continuity in his Christian conduct when being confronted by others who opposed him and the gospel message. This includes Paul's patience with witnessing to the Gentiles, and others accepting him as authentic. Although Timothy is young and chosen for this work, there are clearly forces which Timothy cannot control. He did not instigate them, but he will have to deal with them as a young pastoral leader. It is obvious that to fulfill this work, the young Timothy will have to rely on all that formative teaching, the power of the Holy Spirit, the prophetic words that were spoken about him, the affirmation of the elders when they laid their hands on him and continue to teach sound doctrine. He would also be required to live his life in such a way that others would have no cause to have judgement or disbelief in him.[22]

Secondly, Timothy was blessed to have a spiritual father that he embraces and can receive instruction. George Montague asserts in the *Catholic Commentary* that "Timothy has learned this way of life from Paul, a way of life tempered by the persecutions he suffered, especially in the three cities named in Acts 13:14-14:20, duringhis first missionary journey."[23] During this period, these young disciples like Timothy often lived with their teachers so they could really immerse themselves in the life and teaching of their teacher or mentors such as Paul. The New Testament witnesses to the fact that Saul, who upon his conversion on the Damascus Road, had his name changed to Paul. The subject of his zeal changed and was redirected as well. He was an educated man and a leading Jew living in Jerusalem. Paul persecuted the

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[22] Michael G. Sirilla, *The Ideal Bishop: Aquinas' Commentary of the Pastoral Epistles*, Catholic University of American Press, 2017, https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1kft8p2.10; https://doi.org/10.3407/j.ctt1kft8p2.

[23] Sirilla, *The Ideal Bishop.*

people of "the Way," who later came to be called Christians. His entire life is filled with persecutions. These persecutions occurred often while Paul was on his missionary journeys. While on these three missionary journeys, he preached about Jesus all along coastal cities and select trade routes. When Paul was in Iconium with Barnabas, they went to the synagogue to preach, and the word went forth with power. There were several Jews and Gentiles present there who received the message, believed, and wanted to know what to do to become a Christian. However, there were some Jews who opposed the message, and it roused the crowd, caused division, and Paul and Barnabas were attacked by the mob and fled for their lives. After this life-threatening encounter, they went on to Lystra and Paul saw a man with crippled feet. Paul noticed that the man had faith to be healed so he called in a loud voice, "Stand Up" and the man jumped to his feet. The man was healed. From this point on, the onlookers thought Paul and Barnabas were Gods, and they prepared sacrifices for them at the city gates. Paul and Barnabas discouraged them and told them they were only humans and not to do this. But while they were trying to restrain the people, some Jews arrived from Antioch and Iconium and turned the crowd into a murderous mob and they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, and he wasleft for dead. Yet, he was not dead. The believers surrounded him, and he was able to escape to the city. The next day, Paul met up with Barnabas and continued their missionary journey to Derbe. It was here that they preached the gospel message and made new disciples. Even after all that happened in Lystra and Iconium, Paul and Barnabas returned to these places where they once again strengthened and encouraged the believers. Furthermore, Paul informed them that to enter the kingdom of God, one would endure many afflictions. Paul experienced this

and he believed that suffering for the sake of the kingdom was part of the journey, but God would deliver us from every affliction. This is consistent with Paul's teaching to young Timothy. Paul further demonstrated to Timothy that although persecutions, oppositions, and false teachers were coming against him, he continued in faithful service. Young Timothy could use this as another reason to follow his example.

The Apostle Paul began his ministry after his conversion by taking three missionary journey to spread the Gospel of Jesus. Saul, who is also referred to as Apostle Paul, began his ministry with the Jews in Antioch. Acts 13:vss records, "they sent out by the Holy Spirit, Saul and Barnabas went down to the seaport of Seleucia and then sailed for the island of Cyprus. There, in the town Salamis, they went to the Jewish synagogues and preached the word of God. (John Mark went with them as their assistant)."[20] Paul and Barnabas emerged as the teachers and prophets of the day spreading the gospel message of Jesus Christ that Jesus forgives sin, frees us from the guilt and penalty of sin,and makes one right with God. This work was done throughout the synagogues in Antioch of Pisidia. As Paul and Barnabas encouraged the Jews and Godly converts to Judaism, many were encouraged and began following them. The crowds grew and the following week when they were out ministering, the Jewish leaders saw their crowds, grew concerned, and began to slander Paul and oppose his teachings. Due to this rejection, Paul and Barnabas decided to take their message to the Gentiles. Yet, they knew it was fitting to begin with the Jews first. The dissention against them continued to grow when some of the Jewish leaders stirred up the influential women and the leaders of the city so much that they incited a mob and ran Paul and Barnabas out of town. Despite this, they continue in steadfastness and

travelled to Iconium to declare their message there, and again the people received the word, and they performed all kinds of signs and wonders through the power of the Holy Spirit and people joined them. Yet, once again opposition arose and Jews, Gentiles, and religious leaders incited a mob and the missionaries had to flee for their lives. Even this did not stop them; they continued to minister in this region believing that God would sustain them.

Paul and Barnabas split before going on their second missionary journey due to disagreement about John Mark. So instead of them going together, they took out on two separate journeys and each of them had new companions to work with. On this Journey, Paul continued preaching the gospel message, except this time he did so with Silas. The two traveled throughout Syria and Cilicia to strengthen the churches they had previouslywitnessed to and expanded their ministry further. It was on Paul's second missionary journey that he goes to Greece, Macedonia, and Galatia. It is on this journey that he meets a teenage Timothy in Lystra and hears about his character, that he is admired in his community, and his mother and grandmother are strong in the faith, but his father is aGreek. One day while Paul and Silas were going down to pray, they noticed a demon- possessed slave girl who was telling people's fortunes as they stopped by, and her ownerwas making a profit off her abilities and possession. Paul noticed this each day and got so disheartened by it that he exercised the demon from the slave girl. Paul's relieving the girl of the demon and stopping the fortune telling led to an angry mob of Jews. The slave master was angry at Paul because he interfered with his money-making scheme, so he dragged Paul and Silas off and carried them to the authorities and they were brought up on charges because of their interference in the

customs of the day. Because of this, Acts 16:22-24 states, “A mob quickly formed against Paul and Silas, and the city officials ordered them stripped and beaten with wooden rods. They were severely beaten and thenthey were thrown into prison. The jailer was ordered to make sure they did not escape. So, he took no chances and put them in the inner dungeon and clamped their feet in thestocks.” Every place that Paul went on his second missionary journey, he encountered uprising from violent angry mobs who were against his teaching. Even when Paul and Silas arrived in Thessalonica, their words and teaching encouraged the people. Therefore, large numbers followed them, but the Jewish leaders were jealous, and they once again gathered mobs to incite violence against them. This uprising led to the attackof Jason and some of the believers being taken to the council and being accused of disturbing the city. The officials charged Paul, Silas, and Jason with treason stating, “they were pledging allegiance to another king-King Jesus” (Acts 17:7). Throughout all the violence, Paul remained faithful and his following continued to grow. He becomes close associates with Priscilla and Aquilla — a married couple and fellow tentmakers like Paul. He also becomes acquainted with Lydia, a businesswoman, who would be very instrumental in furthering the gospel message.

On Paul’s third missionary journey, he traveled throughout Macedonia and Rome, encouraging the people and preaching. A riot broke out in Ephesus because Paul taught against man-made Gods which were a lucrative business in Ephesus. So, Paul was forbidden to continue ministering because his teaching had caused such anger among the craftsmen. He continued to endure these persecutions throughout his

ministry.Even before the elders, Paul declared how much he had suffered for the sake of the Gospel. In Acts 20: 18-21, Paul states,

> You know that from the day I set foot in the province of Asia until now I have done the Lord's work humbly, yes with tears. I have endured trials that came to me from the plots of the Jews. Yet I never shrank from telling the truth, either publicly or in you homes. I have one message for Jews and Gentiles alike, the necessity of turning from sin and turning to God, and of faith in our Lord JesusChrist (Acts 20: 18-21 (NRSV).

The last component that will enable Timothy to continue is the holding fast to the holy scriptures. Paul appeals to Timothy to hold fast to sound doctrine and that the scriptures that he learned as a child are still useful for teaching, correcting, training us how to live righteous, and will equip us for every good work God has ordained for us.

Furthermore, the scriptures are the inspired word of God. Although these are words written by mortal men, they are inspired by God and given to God's people with a variedpurpose. He infers that this is how he has made it through all his trials and persecutions by remembering the scriptures and by the power of the Holy Spirit. Considering all the other Christian traits that Timothy has, these along with the holy scriptures will assist him in overcoming everything and provide him the spiritual fortitude that is needed to fulfill his ministry. As Paul comes to close his farewell discourse to Timothy, it iscritical for him to close with this statement because during this period, there are various false teachers like Hymenaeus, Philetus, the Judaizers, Gnostics, religious leaders, counterfeit teachers without power, and the Greco-Roman culture and customs — all rising up to reject this new gospel message that Paul and Timothy preached. These false teachers, especially the Gnostics, continued to pose a threat to Christianity. They undermined the faith that believers had in the resurrection of Jesus' body. The Gnostics did not believe in a bodily resurrection of Christ. There were

those who believed that the body was evil, and they could not see how goodness or a deity with power could dwell in an evil body. Their teaching continued to undermine the message of Paul and Timothy. Therefore, it was incumbent upon this young Timothy to cling tightly to the scriptural foundation that he had been taught. It was sound doctrine, and it was what he learned as a young youth.

Paul was later imprisoned and awaiting execution. This led some of their followers to believe that the power and influence of their ministry would not survive in their world. These truths made it even more challenging for Timothy to continue in his ministry. However, Paul once again compels Timothy to rely on his childhood teaching of the scripture and holy living, and how it informed him about God's plan of redemption. It was these truths that would help Timothy and other Christians to live a disciplined life that pleased God.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Paul, in his letter to the young adult Timothy, urges him to hold fast and to endure faithful suffering. This suffering, the perilous times, the false teachers, and avarice provide a direct correlation with what pastors and young leaders are faced with today. Timothy comes to learn that these are signs that the end was drawing near. These actions are evidence that Timothy is living in this reality and is challenged to emulate the Apostle Paul, if he wants to remain steadfast and continue. Paul is known as an exemplary role model, teacher, apostle, and pastor. Even today, Paul's faithful endurance through life's hardships makes Polycarp, Aquinas, pastors,

and bishops continue to lift up Paul as one who lived and died for his mission and the gospel message.

Moreover, Second Timothy 3:1-17 provides the modeling, the strategy, and outcomes of a faithful process of discipleship which is demonstrated in Timothy's young adult life. What is evident in this pericope is that a passionate leader saw a young person, took him under his care and tutelage, and began to instruct, model, demonstrate, and build a meaningful relationship that lasted a lifetime. And from this a young Timothy emerges as the pastor of a flaggingly church that is steeped in the troubles of the age. Therefore, Paul's life and words encourage and tell him to remember what you have learned in your earlier instruction of the law and your teachings, remember the things that you saw me endure, and imitate me. It is for these reasons that I chose this pericope. It exemplifies the types of relationships that are still needed in our churches and communities today. This closeness creates that sense of belonging, worth, and meaningfulness that is missing in some of our churches today and it may be this truth that is causing our young adult to disengage.

Secondly, Paul and Timothy's relationship is a perfect illustration of Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory in practice. From their relationship, we can see that one learns new behaviors from observation, modeling, and imitation. These behaviors can be emulated and internalized throughout one's life to assist them in their spiritual and personal lives.

Thirdly, this pericope offers insight into the plethora of problems that are present in the world, and we all are navigating them, and we must begin to develop a

better strategy to manage these factors so that we may continue to engage in everyday life, the church, and have hope during despairing times.

As the church continues to see the decline of young adults at alarming numbers, we must begin to look at new ways to re-engage them and peak their interests once again. It is clear to the church from Barna Research Reports, denominational statistical reports, and local church reports that this is one of the critical issues facing our church today. It is my hope to develop a ministry model that can identify the factors causing young people to disengage and utilize something from the models that are currently working. Just as Paul called for the church to shift with his style of leadership and passionate endurance, it is also time for the church to shift and use their creative imagination and innovation to re-engage our young adults. Once this is done, I believe we will have more young adults re-engaging and continuing their discipleship within the church and eventually reaching out in new ways to their community.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

Today we are confronted with all kinds of crisis in the world, but what is the real impact on our children and on the family in general? Currently, we are dealing with COVID-19, racial reckoning, war on Ukraine, voting rights under assault, public education, climate control, freedom of speech, and the cycle of poverty; if all of these issues are left unattended, it will have a crippling effect on our children and their future. Therefore, it is incumbent upon all of us to begin to rally together in our respective places and corners of the world to devise relevant strategies and programs to assist our young people in their training, development, and sustainability in the world. If they are just left as casualties of our societal ills, then generations of gifted young people will be lost within our systems, unable to reach their full potential, disengage altogether, and lose hope. This will truly be our nation's collective loss because not only will this affect the young person's immediate family, but it will also impact their future giftedness and contributions to the community and the world. Therefore, I recommend that we continue to glean from outstanding programs like the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), which was founded by George Williams during the Industrial Revolution Era

in London in 1844.[1] Programs such as this rise to the occasion and connect young adults to meaningful and structured programming that empowers them. Not to mention, in most cases, these programs change the trajectory of their lives for the better. It is evident that the YMCA finds young people at pivotal moments in their life, models appropriate standards of behavior, and provides instruction for optimal living through ongoing mentoring. This is exactly what happened in 1844 as the Young Men's Christian Association responded to young men being left out on the street to deal with the unhealthy social conditions of the industrial revolution.[2]

> Ralph W. Bullock details how the Young Men's Christian Association took America by Storm with its methodology and ability to address the needs of young men early on. He states, 'Eight years after its founding in England the Y.M.C.A. Movement spread to America and the offerings of its programs gradually became as varied and as wide as the major needs and interest of the people with whom it worked. The hopes, desires and aspirations of young men and the conditions under which they lived became an interest and concern of the Y.M.C.A. as it spread over this country.'[3]

Although the Young Men's Christian Association has outreaching at its very core, it also focused on adult education from its inception in 1844[4] in London, England. This was the method they used to accomplish the vision of transforming young men's personalities and assisting them in having a good impact on society.[5]

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[1] Harold Begbie, *The Ordinary Man, The Extraordinary Thing* (New York, NY: Hodder & Stoughton, 1912), 3-5.

[2] Ralph Bullock, "The Adult Education Program of the YMCA Among Negroes," *The Journal of Negro Education* 14, no. 3 (Summer 1945): 385-389, https://www.jstor.org/stable/2293004.

[3] Bullock, "The Adult Education Program of the YMCA Among Negroes," 385.

[4] Bullock, "The Adult Education Program of the YMCA Among Negroes," 385.

[5] Bullock, "The Adult Education Program of the YMCA Among Negroes," 385.

The "industrial revolution was the process of change from an agrarian and handicraft economy to one dominated by industry and machine manufacturing. These technological changes introduced novel ways of working and living and fundamentally transformed society."[6] Yet, George Williams witnessed what was going on during this time; it had a transformative impact but also destructive effects. So, he decided to start a "supportive community" for young men.[7] In its simplest form, the young men's association would be a union all men, regardless of one's denomination, and it would raise the life standards of young men around the world.[8] He knew he could not do this alone so he prayed and asked God for assistance to help meet this growing need. George, along with eleven of his friends, gathered around prayer and conversation and the Young Men's Christian Association was birthed.

The young association was so innovative and needed that it took root quickly in the United States and seven years later at the Old South Church in Boston another association was birthed, but this time they had a building to begin doing greater ministry.[9] Suddenly, other chapters of the organization began to form with different focuses and to meet the varying needs of their contexts.

The YMCA is a stellar non-profit organization today, yet it started as a movement from humble beginnings and with eleven men who were passionate about doing something for young men. This movement saw swift growth in its early years, but

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[6] Britannica Encyclopedia, s.v. "industrial revolution," Brittanica.com/industrial revolution.

[7] Britannica Encyclopedia, s.v. "industrial revolution," Brittanica.com/industrial revolution.

[8] Britannica Encyclopedia, s.v. "industrial revolution," Kids.brittanica.com/scholars/articles/YMCA/78072.

[9] Begbie, *The Ordinary Man*, 21.

it also faced sporadic failures when there was missional uncertainty, war, violence, and racial injustice. Yet each time these external forces showed themselves, George Williams and his leaders rose to the challenge. They learned from each failure. These failures led them to find their catalyst for their mission in the world.

This Historical Foundations chapter will focus on the devoted man, George Williams, as he sought to develop a remedy for the young people of his time because they were the ones impacted the most by the societal ills of war, poverty, and homelessness that were present during the Industrial Era. Considering that we are facing these same issues still today in our churches and our communities, I conclude that the YMCA is a key model that can give direction and provide proven strategy on how to develop a model for young adult re-engagement that ensures their growth, development, and informs them how to deal with external forces. This is so important because this enables them to fulfill their mission in life and provides tools to assist them daily. This paper will focus on five central areas that were part of George Williams formation and sustainability of his work — the YMCA. These five central areas are: assessment of the societal ills confronting our young people, understanding what is at stake if one does nothing, developing a relevant mission and vision to meet the pressing needs, develop core principles that are foundational and empowering, and record the impact of your work on people's lives.

George Williams: the Early Years

The Industrial Revolution was a period of transformation for all and began in Europe. Yet, this revolution impacted all of us around the world. The Industrial Revolution covered a period roughly from 1750 to 1850 and the world saw the emergence of bustling cities with novel ideas in politics with the rise of new forms of energy and the rise of urban industrial cities.[10] These changes brought with it new advances in London and America going from wood to coal. There was mass production of iron and textiles and the emergence of new architecture which included the rise of factories, working mills, and cheap-unskilled child labor and young adult labor which included young boys and women.[11] As the demand for these commodities – iron, textiles, energy, and hydropower – grew, so did its overarching effect on the social and physical well-being of our children. This period of industrialization gave London and America the Spinning Jenny, a machine that had eight spinning wheels instead of one; this meant better efficiency and greater production and profits; blast furnaces which mined coal were placed in smaller cities and this changed those cities in unforeseen ways; the emergence of the steam engine meant that mills and factories could now be placed anywhere in a city and be productive. Yet, all these advances took its toll on our artisans, children, and our already struggling small cities because they all were displaced and felt the effects of the industrial revolution and all that emerged.[12]

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[10] Britannica Encyclopedia, s.v. "industrial revolution," Brittanica.com/industrial revolution.

[11] Kathleen James-Chakraborty, "Architecture since 1400," University Of Minnesota Press, 526, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.ctt9qh39w.21.

[12] Kathleen James-Chakraborty, "Architecture since 1400," University Of Minnesota Press, 255-262, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.ctt9qh39w.21.

We began to see the emergence of a whole new way of living that was foreign to many, so people had to adjust if they were planning to survive this massive overhaul of their pattern of living. This brought tremendous growth to London in the increase in factory work, and the quality of life was better for some families. However, this was not the case across all classes of people. The younger men and boys were affected greatly by this as many of them sought gainful employment.

Young George Williams experienced the impact of the industrial revolution himself. In the Autumn of 1821, George was born the youngest of his family. Even at an early age, he was touted as being different than the rest of his sibling. He was characterized as being "diminutive, sensitive, gentle, bright, vivacious, and sharp" for a young man.[13] In the book, *The Ordinary Man*, it states

> the family attended Dulverton Church and George took a special liking to prayer. One would say he had the instinctive nature to pray for people in general. As George grew up, his father had him become an apprentice to Mr. Holmes, a draper at Bridgewater. It was during this time while working with him that George had this kind of spiritual rebirth that awakened him to the love of God and sensitivity to the souls of others. This apprenticeship demanded that all his apprentices attend chapel services.[14]

It was here that George realized the dichotomy between good and evil, sin and love as opposites, and his Christian character as a young man. George's life was transformed and redirected by a sermon that he heard one day in chapel. He was so transformed that he went back to the shop, knelt on his knees, and gave his heart to the Lord. Noticeable changes were taking place in George's life.[15] There was a boldness that had come upon

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[13] Begbie, *The Ordinary Man*, 9.

[14] Begbie, *The Ordinary Man*, 9.

[15] Begbie, *The Ordinary Man*, 12.

him, and he began to pray for the concerns of young men and the men that he worked alongside.

Shortly after this awakening experience, his father presented him at the age of nineteen to Mr. Hitchcock who as a lead draper in Ludgate Hill. George worked diligently in the factory amongst the worst of conditions. There were long work hours, a half hour break, and poor meals that did not sustain an individual for such long hours. It was this experience from working in these conditions that led George Williams to realize there really was nothing constructive and empowering for young men to do in London. As time passed, George continued to notice there were many young men working these long hours, poverty stricken, malnourished, and lacking in spiritual fulfillment. This led George to even being more compassionate about seeking out young men, building relationship, establishing a prayer life, and then he would offer them salvation. It was one of George's main priorities to share the love of God and demonstrate the love for humanity as he lived his daily life. This priority started with a strong will to pray for all young men, not just the wealthy young men but the outcast and less fortunate. George recounts the story of Mr. Hitchcock, who did not really care for him and initially told George he was too small and really could not do much with him.

He really did not like George's passionate position to spread the Gospel and pray for people. Well, this same man had heard that George had begun to pray for him and his salvation. Mr. Hitchcock confronted him and asked George, "why are you praying for me?" George told about the conditions of the workplace and told Mr. Hitchcock the truth about how he treated people. Mr. Hitchcock listened, he respected George, and told him to continue praying for him. He was transformed and eventually

he became part of George's young men's association.[16] George had won him over with his compassionate spirit.

The Negative Hold of London on Youth

George had always felt London had a negative hold on the young men who sought work in London. His sentiments are felt in these words:

> He thought of the thousands of young men pouring into London from the provinces, thousands of pure and innocent lives for whom the city waited like a hungry lion, thousands of men inexpressibly dear to their parents, inexpressibly precious to England, inexpressibly precious to God. They came to London, many of them, upright, chivalrous, manly, industrious, honorable, and, in some cases, dreaming dreams. And London had nothing for them but foul dormitories, heartbreaking hours of labor, the companionship of debased and brutalized minds, the excitements of the tavern, the perils of the street, the hell of disenchantment and despair. Could nothing be done for them? Nothing to save them? Nothing to develop and uplift them?[17]

One day while George was out walking with Edward Valentine, a dear friend, he told him of this compelling desire to "spread in every large establishment profound religion all throughout London. He would do this by spreading the love of God all over the land."[18] Yet, he needed someone to assist him in this endeavor. The following strategy he would employ was a spirit of prayer, a spirit of love, and a spirit of service. His hope was that one day London would be this place that had total devotion to God, and it would resonate throughout the world. So, after sharing this dynamic dream with his dear friend, he asked him if he would get involved in this Godly work if given the

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[16] Begbie, *The Ordinary Man*, 18.

[17] Begbie, *The Ordinary Man*, 19.

[18] Begbie, The Ordinary Man, 12.

opportunity. Mr. Valentine said yes and made a commitment to join George in fulfilling his dream. Not only did George want his dear friend to join in this work, but he was also looking for other dedicated men to assist him in his mission. It was not long after revealing his heart's desire to his dear friend that letters were circulated in all the draperies in London asking for men to join them in their meaningful work.[19] Eleven dedicated men joined them at their first meeting, and they agreed on establishing a Young Men's Christian Association from that moment on.[20] It was Mr. Williams' compassionate character and his love for true religion that allowed him to embrace this endeavor. He spent the rest of his life dedicated to the Young Men's Association. It was here that the basic foundational principles of the association were established, and George Williams would continue to build on these.

During the year of 1863, George Hitchcock, George's employer, took drastically ill, and the family decided to take George Williams, the young apprentice, in as partner. Afterall, George had proved himself a loyal servant and he had changed the environment for its betterment. George married the apprentice's daughter and became a wealthy. He could have spent the money on anything and even wasted it on lavish living, but George was frugal and decided to devote all his wealth to upbuilding of the Young Men's Association.[21] Because of George's generosity, the YMCA was able to help young men with their essential needs. George's character continued to exemplify compassion, courage, and the spiritual upliftment of others. Through his strong

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[19] Begbie, *The Ordinary Man*, 20.

[20] Begbie, *The Ordinary Man*, 20.

[21] Begbie, *The Ordinary Man*, 19-22.

character and dedication, he was able to transform so many young men's lives in London. Clearly, George had assessed the plaguing problems that confronted so many young men, and it was this assessment that propelled him all his life. Moreover, he was able to realize that if these issues were not addressed, they would create a paralyzing cycle that would become these young men's demise. Therefore, George continued the work and never grew tired of the spiritual upliftment of others.

Five Spiritual Uplifts, Fulfilment and Potential Pillars of the YMCA

Spiritual Uplift of the YMCA

Secondly, George knew the spiritual upliftment and potential of a man was at stake. He knew this because of his own experience of growing up and working on the farm of Devonshire, the grueling factory work hours, and unpleasant conditions. He also believed that one must have gainful employment, labor skills, and a relationship with God. He knew from his own encounters with Mr. Hitchcock and the men at the factory that it would benefit one to have someone to mentor them and upbuild them mentally, physically, and spiritually or one would wander aimlessly, thus ending up on the streets of London. This would mean that their sacred worth and future would never be realized, and George did not want this.

A Clear Vision of the YMCA

Third, George had this clear vision from the beginning about what he wanted to do for young men throughout London. It truly was a mission and vision from God that

had three essential elements as stated by his son. He said, "we believe that the most important thing in life is character; second, that without Christ the perfection of character is impossible; and third, the way to approach to Christ is through prayer and reading the Bible. This was the foundational thing in his father's soul, and he lived it."[22] These three elements were the backbone of all that the Young Men's Christian Association was built upon. These core elements were how they organized their expansive work around the world.

In 1844, a group of men that had responded to the initial invitations posted around the draperies responded. The group met at St. Martin's Coffee House. George presided over the meeting and there was a large presence of men from all walks of life at this initial meeting. It was decided early on by the men that they would follow those three essential elements for establishing the association. It was decided at this first meeting that they would need to secure a regular meeting place to conduct meetings and work out their plan, so they secured the Radley Hotel-Blackfriars for a costly weekly amount and the young association began to grow. Before the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) was even five months old, there were some 160 men attending their meetings.

George was pleased with their growth, but he still felt this compassion to reach further to the men who were dealing with loneliness and the temptation of the streets. Although George felt this compassion and sensitivity to the darkness of the soul, there were others in the group who disagreed with him. There was a great argument around who could be included, and some wondered was teaching about physical morality important? After much debate and fall out, it was decided that they would teach young

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[22] Begbie, *The Ordinary Man,* 28.

men about physical morality. So, lectures were brought into the meeting to teach morality. There were naysayers who scorned the group and laughed at the young association stating that they were simply a place "for the prigs — a self-righteous, moralistic people who act superior to others."[23] Despite these attacks, the group continued to fulfill its mission and vision. The group held their regular prayer sessions, Bible study, and would invite prominent guest lectures from prominent churches and cathedrals. These events were well attended by many. Those essential elements grounded their work no matter where a new association was started. It was clear to George Williams that with associations forming in other parts of the world, they must have this foundation in order to sustain itself because this was the core of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA). As they continued to prosper, the YMCA became well known "as a beneficent institution to churches and commerce agencies."[24] When George was in Paris in 1852, he inquired if an YMCA existed in the city and was told there was no such association, and it would never exist in their city.[25] This challenged George even more and "he decided to call a meeting, open a subscription list, and begin establishing a YMCA in Paris. Furthermore, from this Paris meeting a young commercial man attended and spread the word of the YMCA to Holland and an association was established there. Then Richard Searle, a young businessman, got news of the work of the association, and he started associations in Adelaide, Calcutta in Montreal, and then from there it continued to spread to Boston and other cities. Yes, it was true that they had humble beginnings as stated below:

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[23] Begbie, *The Ordinary Man*, 34.

[24] YMCA, "Our History," https://ymca.org/who-we-are/our-history.

[25] Begbie, *The Ordinary Man*, 34.

> At this day the Association claims to be the greatest Brotherhood in the world – – from Humble beginnings in 1844 of twelve young men, with the modest expenditures of 2 Shillings, 6 days weekly, it has so multiplied itself that today there are upwards of 8000 Branches in 46 countries, with its membership of nearly one million, some 1300 Associations possessing their own buildings, valued at 16 million pounds.[26]

Yet, the YMCA grew and expanded to the United States, Canada, and Australia touching the lives of men, but today it touches the lives of men, women, youth, and young adults.

Meeting the Needs of Young Men: the YMCA

The fourth component was being able to meet the needs and understand the needs of the young men of the day. This was truly a gift that George Williams had to see the need of these men and meet it. Some men needed direction, motivation, and help with life's transitions, and the YMCA was able to meet their needs with their mission. Their mission, according to Mr. Virgo, was the making of character.

> This was their central enthusiasm. The Association stands for the development of the whole man: body, mind, and spirit. It exists to make men physically, wholesome, mentally efficient, and spiritually strong. It does not develop only one part of the man's character, and leave the rest to shift for itself, to decay, to become corrupt, to atrophy. It holds that no one side can be developed alone without injury to the rest.[27]

It was clear to the YMCA and Mr. Virgo that they held the key to the growth of the character and spiritual well-being of men. The programs of the YMCA were multifaceted and they created industry programs that met the needs of young men and in turn improved that industry's working environment. The YMCA's call to the industrial field was a given because of three critical factors: the young men were in these

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[26] Begbie, *The Ordinary Man*, 35.

[27] Begbie, *The Ordinary Man*, 48.

industries working in mass numbers, the conditions that the industry itself created could be addressed by the YMCA, and they could be reached because the YMCA was right there in the community. The compelling nature of the YMCA was a catalyst to transform the lives of men and train them in Christian service and render service in their communities and the world.[28]

George was so impassioned about the impact of the Association that he proclaimed if a city had associations, those cities would be prosperous because in those cities there were men of great character and spiritual fortitude resided. He further stated, "no one is out of their senses will deny that a sober, virtuous, and athletic people are essential to a nation's greatness. A nation cannot be great if men are abandoned to intemperance, gambling, vice, and slothful lounging. The competition is too keen. The stress of life is too severe."[29] Therefore, a nation must make an investment in their men by pouring into their souls with spiritual, moral, and practical living skills; this is the only way a nation can raise up and become strong, thus having strong young men. And if men would be faithful to the association and if our nations furthered embraced their mission and vision, they would see the change in the man's countenance where they hang out and in their overall life. It was evident that the Young Men's Christian Association had transformed not only the lives of young men and women, but the organization transformed urban life and the ecclesiology and programming of the institutional church. With the emergence of YMCA buildings and clubs going up all over the world from New

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[28] Charles R. Towson, "Industrial Program of the Young Men's Christian Association," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 103 (September 1922): 134-137, https://jstor.org/stable/1014969.

[29] Begbie, *The Ordinary Man*, 49-50.

York to San Francisco and even Shanghi, there was a great ripple effect in how the world thought about leisure time and the YMCA now offered all people the opportunity for structured activity that was meaningful and transformative. The church in turn began to look at how it would structure its programming and discipleship in new ways to address the needs of the whole individual.[30] This in turn would affect the family, the workplace, and their communities. All these entities would be better off because of their involvement and teaching from the YMCA.

The Advantages of the YMCA

Lastly, the recording of their impact and understanding the advantages of the association across the world would help to show that the YMCA was critical to people's lives, humanity, and the betterment of the world. One of North America's YMCA supporters recounts the story of a woman directing two young men who were wasting their time doing nothing but getting into trouble and the mother calls and ask could the young men become part of the Association and use the gym. The YMCA obliged them. The young men first began to work out in the gymnasium to work on their physical bodies. Then they began to have them attend the lectures so they could learn about how to navigate themselves in the world. Well, the men continued with the YMCA and later went on to school and one of the young men would keep in touch with the association. As time went on, the young man became a physical director, kept in contact with his mother, and would send her ten dollars weekly out of his meager thirty dollars salary.

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[30] Paul Lupkin, *Manhood Factories: YMCA Architecture and the Making of Modern Urban Culture* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2009),181-184, https://www.jstor.com/stable/10.5749/j.ctts4sw.10.

This was just one example of the impact that joining the YMCA would have on young people. The advantages were obvious because young men were given constructive things to learn and do. These two men lives had been drastically changed by attending the gymnasium and working on their physical bodies. But the Association did not just stop there, they continued with the moral and spiritual development of these young men.

In addition to this, when President Roosevelt decided to build the Panama Canal and send young men of various trades to this region, he consulted with the YMCA and asked them to bring their Clubs to this region so that the young men and women could do constructive things. President Roosevelt understood the critical need for these men and women to not just visit the bars, taverns, and social clubs. These workers, while some of them were away from their families, needed something to strengthen their inner character, physical bodies, and spiritual fortitude. The YMCA came into this area, and it aided the young and men and women and kept them focused on their work at hand and strengthened them.[31] In America, we believe in the transformative impact of the YMCA. That is why the army, the president, and other institutions called upon them.

The YMCA and African Americans

Moreover, the first YMCA serving African Americans was started in 1853 in Washington, DC, by Anthony Bowen. Realizing the needs of the city, Bowen felt that starting an association could better his people.[32] There are other accounts that state that

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[31] YMCA, "Our History," https://ymca.org/who-we-are/our-history.

[32] Nina Mjagki, *Light in Darkness: African Americans and the YMCA: (1852-1941*) (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1994), 17-18.

when the YMCA first came to America in 1852, it did not open its doors to African American people at many of the elite clubs; however, they would allow African Americans to open up separate clubs under their own charters. The clubs really mimic the sentiment of the country at that time, and it was not until the Civil Rights Movement that we saw the most drastic change to many of the clubs' rules.[33] Even though separate clubs were established and the core principles were used, African Americans still were able to see the advantages of the club and how its core principles helped transform the whole person. Begbie asserts in *The Ordinary Man* that,

> America businessmen recognize that the moral character and the intellectual efficiency of the men they employ are matters of first-rate importance to the successes of their undertakings. And so, they build the great clubs, provide the equipment, and then come along to the Association for the men to run them. Why? Simply because we are recognized as experts in making men. There is no one else doing the same job. If a better institution came along, then we should have to shift.[34]

The YMCA is still in existence today because of the success of its ability to build up people from all facets of life. They meet the needs of all ages, classes, ethnicities, and gender.

The YMCA still holds to its essential values that George Williams established in that first meeting, yet the Association has expanded in manifold ways. Today, the YMCA assists over 10,000 communities throughout the world. Today, the YMCA assists men and families through programs, gymnasiums, Bible studies, prayer, lectures, and classes that teach life skills and empowerment of the individual. They are still the most influential association of the day when it comes to building up and spiritually

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[33] Mjagki, *Light in Darkness*, 11-18.

[34] Begbie, *The Ordinary Man*, 223.

uplifting the whole person. Today, the Association focuses on "empowering people to reach their full potential, to improving well-being, inspiring action, strengthening communities, and ensuring everyone has the opportunity to become healthier, more confident, connected, and secure."[35]

Conclusion

In summary, this historical element establishes that the YMCA is foundational to my doctoral ministry project because it addresses many of the factors as well as exemplifies a tested and effective model for ministry that assists in young adult empowerment, engagement, and re-engagement. The doctoral ministry project looks at the process how George Williams, the founder of the Young Men's Christian Association, started first with a compelling desire from God to meet a great need in London. He was able to understand that because of the Industrial Revolution, young men were being called to work in factories and hold down jobs; so, these young men went to work. Yet, from his assessing the situation about the young men spending twelve-hour days working in the factory, then going to the bars, and hanging out on the streets, this burdened George's heart. Furthermore, he knew from how Mr. Hitchcock treated him, his long hours in the factory, meager and poor food rations, and no sign of spiritual teaching anywhere, how long could one go on like this. Although he had a spiritual foundation, how would someone who did not have this survive this oppressive existence? The questions for George Williams were: "Can we offer these men nothing

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[35] Begbie, *The Ordinary Man*, 56-57.

for the soul?" "Can we offer these men nothing for the spirits?" Can we offer these men nothing to build up their physical bodies?" When our young people are confronted with the new drugs of the day, abuse, neglect, alcohol abuse, the cycle of poverty or poor school districts, do we have nothing to offer them in the church? Can we not offer them sanctuary? Can we not offer them spiritual mentorship? Can we not offer them a place of safety from all that harms them?[36] So, I feel what George Williams felt, and I am compelled to develop a ministry model that will help identify the external factors that are hindering their engagement but also find those components that will assist in their re-engagement. It is clear to me that George Williams, from his own personal experience, was able to see that when one is left unattended to do whatever they want to do, or does not have anything to ground them, then they are left to their own vices and temptations. So, this is the starting point for my project — being able to assess what are the external and internal factors affecting young leaders from full participation in the life and leadership of the church. Secondly, once the assessment has been made, one must understand what really is at stake or what is the long-term effect if we just sit in our pews and do nothing. Or in George Willems case, he saw that if young men were left alone in London with no spiritual, mental, physical, and character building, then that would be their demise. They would be swallowed up by the evils and temptations of the London streets. Moreover, he saw that not only would this impact the individual's life, but it would also affect their contribution to life and communal life.

Therefore, we must do something not to lose the potential, the gifts, and abilities of these young adults. Hence, this is also the case in my project, that if we do not

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[36] Begbie, *The Ordinary Man*, 19.

develop a ministry model that effectively addresses this, then we lose the gifts, the potential of the individual is thwarted, and some lose hope altogether. So, we must do something.

Third, the YMCA under George Williams established a simple mission and vision that believed in the development of the entire individual, not just one part of the individual. Because if you only build up the physical man, the spiritual and the intellectual man is still lacking. So, he developed these core principles that continue to be the foundation of the YMCA. Although the YMCA has expanded its scope, and it is currently open to everyone, it remains consistent in its core principles. Similarly, my project will propose a ministry model for young adult re- engagement that has five critical pieces that must be present to bring awareness of the critical needs for our young adults to re-engage back into the local church. Once George Williams assessed and understood what was at stake and developed his mission, vision, and core principles, he began to establish clubs throughout the world.

Lastly, we were able to see the impact of the Associations in various parts of the world. Often, we do not record our successes or track our members across time, and I have this as a part of my future project that we begin to monitor and look at the future progress of those who came through this new ministry model. We often do great things, but we do not get to see the long-term progress of our participants, or we do not encourage them to call us back and give us progress or even tell how the program has assisted them in their daily living.

Furthermore, the detailed story of the YMCA shows how much work is needed to develop a program. From its inception, George Williams was a man who had a vision,

yet at first, he kept that vision to himself for many years. But one day, he decided to share his heart's desire with a dear friend. Sharing with this friend allowed him to have some accountability or second opinion about the great work he wanted to do. His friend, Mr. Valentine, said yes and the two began to strategize about the lifelong work. This also is important because it shows that a strategy or process is needed to bring such a project to fruition. The two men were able to strategize, and they decided to call a meeting and gather more support — just as I am gathering contextual associates to help design the DMin project and give insight. This will help strengthen the project and will provide suggestions to make the project effective. Also, the YMCA learned from its failures. They had moments of failure where some Associations closed their doors, but some of them also remained opened and learned how to readjust to the real needs of the day. This led to the YMCA redefining itself to meet the needs of the day. They desired to stay relevant, and several clubs did what was necessary to remain relevant. This is important for churches to realize as we seek to meet the needs of young people and their re-engagement back into the local church. Even today the YMCA continues to look out for the betterment of people, and they have never tried to be something they are not. They have never let go of the mission: they stuck with their "why" and this has allowed them to become masters at building up the character of all individuals. As we look to the future, churches are also being called to remember what their mission is and reclaim their "why." The story of George Williams' modest beginnings serves as a strong example of how faith, disciplined living, and principles can change the trajectory of one' life.

George came from a poor family, yet he had strong character. From his early years as a child, he had a profound connection with God through prayer and he continued to use this gift when he worked at the drapery, when he ministered to the men at the factory, and each time he started an Association. Our young people today have these natural innate gifts, but often there are not individuals around them who can help them find their gift, nurture it, and show them how to deploy it. George was spiritually grounded, wanted to work and better himself, and his life was transformed after coming home from a church service one evening. He strongly believed that God could do great things in a person's life if they would surrender to God's will

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

This Theological Foundations chapter provides theological grounding for my problem statement and hypothesis utilizing two theological frameworks: ecclesiology, the study of the role and function of the church, and practical theology, the process of applying our biblical doctrines and theory into relevant praxis for everyday living. The context and background for this chapter are relevant to the ministry of Christ Community United Methodist Church, located in the urban core of North County St. Louis. The municipality is called Jennings. I have pastored Christ Community for nineteen years and noticed that there is a major problem. The problem that I noticed was "that young adults have disengaged from active participation in the church." Yet, many of them were baptized, equipped, and grew spiritually while they were active, but now are no longer engaged. My hypothesis is that "if the lay leadership and young adults will attend a six-week seminar on re-engagement of young adults (eighteen through twenty-seven), then they would be empowered to develop a ministry model for young adult re-engagement back into the local church." This new model would seek to reclaim young adults as a vital part of the body of Christ, remind them of their spiritual heritage and gifts, and re-engage them in the mission and vision of the local church's discipleship program. In addition to this, the church and community would witness a revival of the young adult's spirit, witness, and various types of relevant engagement for the church. Young adults would

begin to deploy their witness, service, and gifts to build and transform their church and community for the greater good of all.

First, this chapter focuses on ecclesiology, the study of the role and function of the church. In this, I will deal with what is the role of the church and how does the role of the church and how it functions influence leadership and disengagement. Why is church leadership so important as it relates to young adult disengagement and re-engagement in the ministry of the church? This will help us to solidify how the Apostle Paul's instructions to Timothy, in 2 Timothy 3:10-14, informs our leadership practices and encourages young adults to continue in their participation or leadership and not disengage. Moreover, the Apostle Paul informs us of who gets to serve in the church, and he exemplifies what the characteristics of effective leadership looks like to his young protégé Timothy.

Secondly, this paper utilizes the framework of practical theology to help the church arrive at new strategies and emerging models for re-engagement of young adults. This frameworks provide a strategic process for the church to discuss and discern the underlying factors that have caused the young adults to disengage. It will bring to light some of the issues that cause disengagement such as transportation issues, trauma, family issues, chronic illness, financial hardship, self-esteem, identity, sexuality, loneliness, mental illness, Covid concerns, and more. After these main factors that led to disengagement are identified, we will look further into the social context and relationships that impact their lives and what is meaningful for these new generations. Then, we will affirm that we are all part of the body of Christ and young adults are a vital

part of the body of Christ; without them engaged there is no future viability for the church to thrive.

Our assignment as Christians, including the young adults, is to be faithful to the "Great Commission" given to us by Jesus Christ in Matthew 28:19-20, which tells all of us to "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."[1] This co-mission is for all of us who are children of God. Furthermore, through practical theology, we discover ways to address the newfound factors that caused disengagement, uncover what is relevant for this generation, and develop new strategies with new entry points for re-engagement.

Theology of Ecclesiology

Ecclesiology is the study of the role and way the church functions and carries out its mission to fulfill God's mission.[2] Stanley J. Grenz states that,

> ecclesiology is the area of theological study concerned with understanding the church (derived from the Greek word *ekklesia*, 'church'). Ecclesiology seeks to set forth the nature and function of the church. It also investigates issues such as the mission, ministry, and structure of the church, as well as its role in the plan of God.[3]

The church is called in unique ways to fulfill the work of building the Kingdom of God utilizing those who have been discipled by the teachings of Jesus Christ and the

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[1] Matthew 28:19-20, NRSV.

[2] Stanley J. Grenz, David Guretzki, and Cherith Fee Nording, *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Westmont, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2010), 94.

[3] Grenz, Guretzki, and Nording, *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms*, 94.

transformative word of God. This is our understanding of how ministry is accomplished in the United Methodist Church. There is a distinctive mark of being a member of the United Methodist Church called "The Ministry of All Christians." *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Churc*h holds a belief that

> through our baptism, we have all been called to be ministers in God's kingdom. Secondly, our baptism sets the stage for the power of the Holy Spirit to work through us and begin our life of ministry within the church. Furthermore, we understand that we are all part of that priesthood of all believers that are called to minister by God to God's creation.[4]

Also, the *Christian as Minister* book, states, "the church is a divine gift coupled with human response. The church cannot be seen apart from its community. When that community is faithful, it transforms and liberates people and institutions from personal and social forms of sin. Freedom and transformation are the critical work of the church in our time —the mission and ministry of the church." [5]

The Body of Christ

There are some Christians who feel that the real work of the church should be left to those who are ordained and have been chosen by God to lead the church. However, looking at the patterns of the apostle Paul and his beliefs about the body of Christ,

> we are all the body of Christ, and we are all invited to use our gifts to bring about the fulfillment of God's mission in the world. It is evident, by the variety of spiritual gifts in the church given by the power of the Holy Spirit, that all people are needed to mature the body of Christ and equip the Church for ministry.[6]

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[4] Brian K. Milford, ed. *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church* (Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), 126-132.

[5] Meg Lassiat, *The Christian as Minister: An Exploration into the Meaning of God's Call to Ministry and the Ways the United Methodist Church Offers to Live Out That Call,* Eighth ed. (Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2013), 10.

[6] Ephesian 4:7-16, NRSV.

The Apostle Paul states clearly to the Corinthian Church, that all are needed, and one gift is not better than the other:

> There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and everyone it is the same God at work. Now to each one the manifestation of the spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same spirit, to another faith by means of the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between the spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues. And to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the works of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines. Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts forms one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit to form one body – whether Jews or Gentiles, slaves or free – and we were all given the one Sprit to drink. Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.[7]

With Paul's theology of the body of Christ, we can see how the absence of young adults between the ages of eighteen through twenty-seven in the local church presents a loss of great magnitude; this is a loss in their generational thinking processes; this is a lost in their fruitful gifts of the spirit, their voice, presence, and service. It is evident that they also have been called to fulfill great commission: "to go ye and make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world."[8]

Yet, there are some churches who believe that the role of leadership should be left to the elder and the deacon's leadership roles of the congregation. They have misunderstood the Apostle Paul's instruction regarding leadership and equipping and think that is for these individuals only. Yet, there are many instances where Paul had women, couples, and young people such as Timothy to lead in equipping the church.

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[7] 1 Corinthians 12:1-14, NIV.

[8] Matthew 28:19-20, NRSV.

Even today, deacons and elders cannot do this great ordering of the church, ministering to all the people, engaging the community, and be the hands and feet of Jesus without the spiritual gifts and service of the laity of the church. It is paramount for a church and its leadership to understand that Jesus Christ is the head of the body of Christ, and God our creator is and ruler of all things. Moreover, Andrew Clarke states, "although we have noted that scholars have increasingly begun to recognize that the early Pauline communities did indeed have leaders and a hierarchical organization, there is still a consensus that Pauline Church order evolved significantly between their early communities and those that are represented by the later epistles." A key element of this reconstruction assumes a straight-line development from the earliest communities to the unequivocal evidence that derives from early second-century Ignatian ecclesiology, in which:[9]

> You must follow the bishop, as Jesus Christ followed the Father, and follow the council of elders, as you would the apostles; respect the deacons as the commandment of God. Nobody must do anything that has to do with the Church without the bishop's approval. Only that the Eucharist which is under the authority of the bishop or whomever he himself designates is to be considered valid. Where the bishop is present, there let the congregation be, just as were Christ is, there is the universal Church. It is not possible without the bishop either to baptize or have a love feast. But whatever he approves pleases God as well, in order that everything you do may be sure and certain. It is good to acknowledge God and the Bishop.[10]

Therefore, this project will be grounded in this understanding that the critical role of the church today is to utilize all its members to carry out the mission of the church, which is God's mission. Moody states this so clearly, "The body of Christ is nothing less than the

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[9] Andrew D. Clarke. "The Titles of Leaders," *A Pauline Theology of Church Leadership,* Bloomsbury Collections (London, UK: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2008), 42-78, http:// dx.doi.org/10. 5040/9780567661180.Ch-003.

[10] Ignatius, Smyrna. 8.1-9.1

presence of Christ himself in the life and of the Christian community."[11] While it is true that there are various offices that individuals hold within the church, everyone has a specific role to engage in ministry.

The Marks and Function of the Church

Throughout time there has been some disagreement about what the distinguishing marks or characteristics of the church are but knowing what the historical marks are helps our understanding about how we carry out its mission and form disciples. Therefore, Thomas Oden's summary of these distinguishing marks are worth noting, as stated is his book, *Life in the Spirit*:

> The church is one, finding its oneness in Christ. The church is holy, set apart from the world to mediate life to the world and bring forth the fruits of the Spirit amid the life of the world. The church is catholic in that it is whole, for all, and embracing all times and places. The church is apostolic in that it is grounded in the testimony of the first witnesses to Jesus' life and resurrection, and depends upon and continues their ministry.[12]

Furthermore, it is the church that believes it is incumbent upon them to fulfill their intended purpose by functioning in the power of the Holy Spirit (*martyria*) to carry out the mandates of Jesus in Acts 1:8, "to go forth and be his witnesses," build this new kingdom community (*koinonia*), and serve (*diakonia*) in God's kingdom.[13] It is from Jesus' mandate on the day of Pentecost that the church understands that we must go forth and be witnesses. Pastors and laity take these intended functions as confirmation that they

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[11] Dale Moody, *The Word of Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1958), 445.

[12] Thomas C. Oden, *Life in the Spirit* (San Francisco, CA: Harper San Francisco, 1992), 303.

[13] Dale Moody, *The Word of Truth: A Summary of Christian Doctrine Based on Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans-Lightning Source, 1981), 429-433.

are in fact co-laborers with Christ. Therefore, many of us with the grace and gifts given to us by the Holy Spirit take up the call to be a part of the leadership team in our churches, serve as leaders over various ministries, equip the laity, and even send them out to serve in manifold ways.

Ecclesiology Matters to Re-engagement

When we look at the alarming numbers of young adults not present or active in the church, we should go back to our foundational groundings that are found in the four components mentioned earlier: the Great Commission and the marks of the church and utilize these to reclaim our role as the church. Once a church has lost its focus that is seen through the framework of ecclesiology, they may become misguided by all kinds of factors that hinder the work of making disciples and moving the church forward. These factors may include: placing all other tasks over the main task — that is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world; focus on our community at the cost of letting the inside of the church and its matters be put aside, not focused on the discipleship of all ages but one age group — the seasoned saints; stewardship growth over spiritual growth, church growth over leadership excellence; or outreach over equipping and nurturing the laity and leadership of the church, social factors that impact the church and resources may not be available and the church cannot find a pathway forward. These are just some of the factors that have caused the church to lose its focus. Naomi Thompson, cited in Mark Scanlan's blog, "Ecclesiology and Youth Ministry," revealed in her research that churches can unintentionally put up barriers to young people

and then wonder why they dis-engaged from the church.[14] One factor that is true is that when we are not intentional about the importance of having young children and youth in the church and keeping them active, raising them up as young adults and equipping them for lifelong service, they will disengage from the church. Therefore, we must keep the framework of ecclesiology – the theology of the church – before us. A church's ecclesiology really does matter. It is the guidepost, and it is the critical piece to help us with re-engagement of young adults. It affirms our biblical understanding of Galatians 3:28 that states, "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."[15] Moreover this understanding is critical because it reminds us of several things: our God given identity and shapes our church's focus and mission, and helps us order the body of believers for lifelong ministry. In Mark Scanlan's blog, "Ecclesiology and Youth Ministry," he draws us back to Kenda Creasy Dean's bold critique where she pointed out that there was a "chasm between youth ministry and the theology of the church as a whole"[16] and challenges the church to close this chasm and begin to reset our ecclesiology and put the youth back at the forefront of the theology of the church. He and other theologians further asserts that our past work with young people and mission work has disconnected them from the church resulting in "untethering" of their place and significance to the ministry

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[14] Naomi Thompson, *Young People and the Church Since 1900: Engagement and Exclusion* (New York, NY: Taylor Francis, 2017), 23.

[15] Galatians 3:28-29, NRSV.

[16] Kenda Creasy Dean and Ron Foster, *The Godbearing Life* (Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 1998), 30.

of the church.[17] This means that we do local church work and then separate out the young people's ministry and work. This factor has also caused disengagement, but if we can reverse it and reprioritize their place in the body of Christ, we can begin to connect our children, youth, and young adults' ministries back to the theology of the church thus aiding in their re-engagement back into the local church. This re-engagement of young adults, their formation, and their lifelong leadership in the church leads us to discern and look at our current practices.

Practical Theology

One school of thought states that "practical theology" is the branch of Christian theology that focuses on the everyday or modern-day implications of Christian theological beliefs. In addition to this, they state that it is the application of theological truth to all life, particularly the life and work of the church.[18] In more laymen terms, practical theology is concerned with the "doing and execution" of how we carry out ministry in the world. It is more than just theology; it is concerned with how we go about being the church in the world and how are people living out these principles, theologies, and doctrines daily to alleviate the problems of life.

Moreover, practical theology deals with a wide scope of how the church takes its doctrines, principles, and theologies and makes application to a multiplicity of social problems: racism, injustice, poverty, sexuality, hedonism, narcissism, greed, and

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[17] David Bailey, *Youth Ministry and Theological Shorthand: Living Among the Fragments of a Coherent Theology* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2019), 869.

[18] Compelling Truth, "Practical Theology-what is it?" https://www.compellingtruth.org/search.php/?zoom_query=practical+theology&submit.x=0&submit.y=0.

competing narratives to do what is right in one's everyday life. These are just some of social problems that challenge the church. Yet, there are also practices of the church that also fall under practical theology (this list is not exhaustive) such as church growth, leadership development, youth ministry, young adult re-engagement ministry and more.

The Roots of Practical Theology

The roots of practical theology can be credited to German theologian, Friedrich Schleiermacher. He believed that the integrative approach of theology and taking one's context into our theology was critical. He offered a new framework for addressing issues that confronted Christians and the ministry of the church. "It came to be known as this regional science that was brimming with hope and was able to integrate the church with the world.[19] Practical theologians like Schleiermacher, Bonhoeffer, and Tillich often felt that the church was too narrow in its approach and challenged the church to focus on methodology as well as our praxis. In recent years, it has taken a more expansive approach by being more integrative. Currently, it includes sociology, psychology, other social sciences and considers one's context to better inform the church about the praxis of the church for new models of ministry. This is very different from the early thoughts of practical theology. However, this new approach allows teachers, pastors, and leaders to make more effective application of what we teach and build our faith upon today. Today, many theologians and church leaders view practical theology as a framework that effectively communicates the gospel message. This is evident when we see churches and

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[19] Christian Grethlein, *An Introduction to Practical Theology: History, Theory, and the Communication of the Gospel in the Present* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), 5-7.

organizations develop new models that address issues confronting the church and the world. For instance, The Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) under the leadership of George Williams developed a bold model in London in 1844 to address the distressing problem of young adult men's displacement and marginalization during the Industrial Era; yet today this model has evolved to address the concerns of all. Also in recent years, The Poor People's Campaign, which is co-led by Rev. Dr. William J. Barber, II, took a prophetic role to campaign and rally tenaciously to end moral issues of world poverty, racism, militarism, and other issues plaguing our poorest citizens. According to Barber, "these atrocities in a nation that is the richest nation in the history of the world constitutes a moral crisis and a failure of the policies focused on greed."[20] These emerging models are still needed today as we seek to re-engage young adults back into the local church.

Practical Theology is Useful for Re-engagement

As we look at the re-engagement of young adults within the church who are between the ages of eighteen to twenty-seven, it is evident that they are bombarded by various social problems and practical theology will help us to critically look at creating pathways that will help them to re-engage. These ways can be very impactful and in alignment with who they are in Christ. In the journal article, "Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood: A Practical Theology for College and Young Adult Ministry, the author states that this age group has challenged the church in its theology because we

[20] William J. Barber, "Why the Poor People's Campaign 2022 Matters," Thenation.com, June 21, 2022, https://www.thenation.com/article/society/poor-peoples-campaign-barber-2022/.

cannot seem to address this dilemma.[21] These writers assert, "so the time of late adolescence, which has received the least attention in Christian education literature, has actually become the period in the life cycle that poses the most far-reaching challenges to the church and theology."[22] The writer states below the critical issues that this age group is confronting today:

> In the United States, the years between the ages of 18 and thirty have long been heralded for their formative potential. Even a surface analysis of this period reveals a dizzying array of critical life tasks: choosing a college, choosing a life calling and vocation, moving away from home for the first time, buying or renting a home, making independent financial decisions, choosing, and maintaining church commitments, forging new friendships and relationships with members of the opposite sex, and embracing the potential for singleness, engagement, marriage, and parenting. These years also mark a crucial stage for developing a worldview and faith stance amid a wide array of competing perspectives. This time of life is often attended to by the need to assume ownership of one's faith and to select mentors and communities capable of challenging and nurturing that faith over the long haul. Many of the choices made in these areas shape the contours of the rest of the life span, serving as gateways to future meaning, lifestyle, and mission. In short, this is the time when the fabric of life is woven together into a discernible and increasingly solidified pattern.[23]

Furthermore, the studies by leading sociologists and psychologists have shown us that there has been a drastic cultural shift in the way this group emerges from those teenage years to young adult, and we must take this into account as we do theology. These sociologist state clearly, "by monitoring five key social events: leaving home, finishing school, becoming financially independent, getting married, and having children

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[21] David P. Setran and Chris A. Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood: A Practical Theology for College and Young Adult Ministry* (Ada, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 402.

[22] Setran and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*, 12; Friedrich L. Schweitzer, *The Postmodern Life Cycle: Challenges for Church and Theology* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2004), 54.

[23] Setran and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*, 2.

have been delayed drastically."[24] The Research Network on Transitions to Adulthood and Public Policy reports that in 1960, more than two-thirds of young adults had attained all five of the markers listed above by the age of thirty; by the year 2000, this was true of less than half of females and less than a third of males. Seventy percent of 25-year-old women had attained these markers in 1960, but only twenty five percent in 2000. The later timing of these traditional roles has reconfigured the shape of life between the ages of eighteen and thirty.[25] This data effects not only how we can better understand young adults but also, challenges the church and its laity to ask the essential question, "what really does matter or what can bring about transformation and re-engagement in their lives?" It is clear from this research that what was meaningful to a young adult twenty or more years ago is not necessarily meaningful or part of the worldview of many of our young adults today.

Barriers to Re-engagement

Re-engagement of young adults back into the local church is not hopeless; church leaders still have many opportunities to discern a way forward that encourages the development of new models of praxis for young adults. Although there are varied models that provide solutions to our problem of disengagement, there are also barriers to the re-engagement of young adults which include: fear of the unknown and what or who will these young adults bring with them, the church's culture is stagnant and not dynamic, lack of interest for creating space and ministry to young adults, no varied entry points to

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[24] Setran and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*, 3.

[25] McArthur Foundation, "Research Network on Transitions to Adulthood," https: //www.macfound.org.

engage young adults; only one entry point which is Sunday worship; young adults are treated as objects and not subjects capable of leading the work of re-engagement; and the church lacks human and financial resources.[26] These are just some of the barriers that hinder the strategies and processes toward finding new pathways forward.

Four Steps to Assist Churches in Re-engagement

As we look at the relationship that the Apostle Paul and Timothy demonstrate in the biblical text in 2 Timothy 3:1-17, it is evident that this mentor and protégé relationship significantly aided in the continued engagement of Timothy in his leadership role. Timothy was considered Paul's beloved son in the ministry and protégé.[27] What is significant about their relationship is that Paul saw the young disciple Timothy and claimed him to come and be a young leader of the church in his youth. This connection was established in Acts 16:2, when the Apostle Paul met Timothy in Lystra and noticed his character and service. Timothy eventually became a faithful student, co-laborer, an eyewitness to the faithful ministry of apostle Paul. Timothy saw Paul's faithfulness and hardships as he struggled to be accepted as a true apostle, his beatings for the sake of the gospel, and his continual imprisonment. But through it all Paul was steadfast no matter what trial or struggle he encountered. Paul created a connection, a faithful community of servants that shared the call to service and mentorship along his ministry. Timothy faced the struggles of being a young leader which are evidenced in chapter three of second

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[26] F. Douglas Powe, Jr., *The Adept Church: Navigating Between a Rock and a Hard Place* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2020), 1-29.

[27] 1 Corinthians 4:17, NRSV.

Timothy. These social problems (which Paul labels distressing times) impacted his ministry and challenged his call to stay steadfast,

> are people being lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful and unholy, in humane, implacable, slanders, profligates, brutes, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to the outward form of godliness but denying the power.[28]

These issues are the same factors in the 21st century that many young adults are dealing with and these factors are impacting their disengagement and their desire to re-engage. Our first step to re-engagement is to challenge the church with its ecclesiology and practical theology to take a moment for discernment and reflection and reset their ecclesiology toward and all-inclusive ecclesiology that retethers the young adults to the theology of the church and include the young adults in the process of developing a new praxis for their young adult ministry along with the church leadership. The second step includes the church learning and broadening their contextual and cultural understandings of young adult — Generation Z and the Millennial culture. These generations are very different from the contexts and cultures most parishioners grew up in. This is evident when Mark Scanlan states from his recent blog that, "if we are to be a church that responds to the key questions of context, whilst existing as both institution and movement, we must learn how to listen to young people as cultural interpreters."[29] Therefore, we must meet them in their places and station and be willing to encounter them where they are; this concept may prove very challenging to some churches and its

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[28] 2 Timothy 3.1-9, NRSV.

[29] Mark Scanlan, "Ecclesiology and Youth Ministry," https://www.youthpastortheologian.com/blog/ecclesiology-and-youth-ministry.

leadership. Furthermore, Montague Williams, in his book *Church in Color*, challenged the church by stating,

> Young people often carry weighty stories. You cannot assume you know what young people are wrestling with just by considering the way they present themselves, or by considering broad claims about youth culture. We gain clearer pictures of who young people are and how we ought to engage theology through those sacred moments when young people choose to share the complexity and previously hidden realities of their lives.[30]

Our third step in re-engagement is to provide mentorship for our young adults that allows them to learn while serving inside the church or the community engagement portion of the discipleship program. Just like the young inexperienced Timothy gleans from the experienced witness and leadership of Paul, young adults need a mentor or role model to tutor them along their journey. The fourth step is collaboration between mentors and young adults (or lay member who walks alongside the young adult) who are like the apostle Paul to create an atmosphere for community, connection, and space for cultural interpreters to envision fresh models of ministry led by the move of the spirit. The Apostle Paul serves as a great example of a mentor and one who dealt with the social ills present in one's context because he was once one who persecuted the church and caused some of the problems, divisions, and challenges of communal life. We can glean from his faithful ministry of service, his tenacious spirit from his conversion, and his call to gospel of Jesus Christ.

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[30] Montague R. Williams, *Church in Color: Youth Ministry, Race and Theology of Martin Luther King* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2020), 1-3.

Conclusion

Considering the two frameworks that were presented in this Theological Foundations chapter, it is evident that the disengagement and decline of young adults from the church is connected to various factors. Some of these main factors include social, contextual, economics, mental health, environmental, family life, spiritual health, relevance, and previous church hurt. In essence, these factors will vary amongst young adults. We also are aware that there are other factors such as a church's theology, polity and doctrine, ecclesiology, mission, vision, and political views which can also cause disengagement of young adults. Yet, this chapter offers two viable solutions for the church after it has prayed and discerned that there is a dis-engagement problem within their congregation. The solutions this theological foundation chapter puts forth are deeper than just hosting a meeting and re-gathering young adults. This chapter challenges the church to revisit their theology of ecclesiology, because whatever that belief is about the role and function of the church, it will be reflected in who gets to serve, who gets equipped for service, and who stands in the place of leadership. A church's ecclesiology or lack of ecclesiology really matters and shapes how the great commission is lived out. Moreover, the evidence in this chapter has shown that when a church's ecclesiology does not believe that we are all part of the body of Christ, meaning some are, but young adults are not or they are, but they are the lesser part of the body, then they are often not included in the discipleship training and programming. Therefore, they are not as important, and this thinking causes this untethering of the youth and young adults ministries and they become separated from the church, and this causes frustration, misinterpretation, and disengagement. But we must evolve and continue to advocate for

an all-inclusive ecclesiology where their witness, fellowship, and service are included. Theologians who are witnesses to this fact are Anthony B. Robinson and Robert W. Wall; they state in their book, *Called to Be the Church: The Book of Acts for a New Day*, "that learning, and teaching is essential and must be done to all members of the church for the equipping of the church."[31] They also clearly state their critique of the church.

> Often the church has put most of its educational eggs in the children and youth basket. There is, of course, nothing whatsoever wrong with great teaching and learning ministry for children and youth. But there is something wrong when it stops there. This is too often the case, our teaching ministry to adults is limited to a very small slice of the congregation or is non-existent, we are not doing a good job of making disciples or equipping the saints for ministry. There are a growing number of excellent resources congregations can use to strengthen their adult teaching and formation ministries. Moreover, pastoral leaders must themselves be teachers of the faith, and they must train and equip others to teach.[32]

Lastly, practical theology, with its integrative approach, will allow the church to take a fresh look at their current practices concerning young adult re-engagement and their formation. Using the four steps to begin to develop a model for re-engagement includes: a time of discernment and reflection to re-tether the young adult ministry back to an all-inclusive ecclesiology (if it has been separated from the church's ecclesiology and discipleship program); learn and broaden our understandings of context and cultural resources; provide mentorship for young adults throughout their journey; and collaboration between mentors and young adults in creating an atmosphere for community, connection, and cultural interpreters to envision fresh ministry models. The mentoring relationship between Apostle Paul and Timothy utilizes these steps to provide continual engagement and encouragement even when young Timothy wanted to

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[31] Anthony B. Robinson and Robert W. Wall, *Called to Be the Church: The Book of Acts for a New Day* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2006), 208-209.

[32] Robinson and Wall, *Called to Be the Church*, 208-209.

disengage from ministry but Paul encourages him to hold fast and cling to what he had been taught and witnessed through his mentor.

In closing, we must acknowledge that the world has changed drastically and so have the young adults that the church is required to offer ministry and lifelong engagement. It is our clarion call as the church to use every resource in this age of digital media, social media, and teleconferencing. Moreover, the post-pandemic era has taught the church how to innovate, how to be outward focus, and how to have worship by doing things virtually on all social media platform or to use the outside premises to engage people. Social media or Zoom gatherings are one strategy that we can utilize to re-engage young adults by having small group gatherings to address some of the factors that have caused their disengagement and offer a safe space to build community among common interests (i.e., sports, hobbies) for re-engagement. For instance, Tabernacle Baptist Church-Gastonia in Gastonia, North Carolina, has a virtual model that engages young adults through Zoom gatherings. This provides a safe place to belong, connect, and converse with others about everyday questions and concerns. New models like this will help the church re-engage young adults in new and meaningful ways — thus, re-engaging them back into the local church.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

The discipline of sociology is very broad and seeks to analyze and explain how human social behavior is influenced by relationships, context and institutions, and various other factors. And through these various factors, meaning and learning takes place throughout one's life.[1] According to University of North Carolina's Department of Sociology, "Sociology's subject matter is diverse, ranging from crime to religion, from the family to the state, from the divisions of race and social class to the shared beliefs of the common culture, and from social stability to radical change in societies."[2] In general, this discipline focuses on society, human social behavior, patterns of social development and relationships, social interaction, and aspects of culture associated with everyday life and how the individual and environments influence and affect one another.[3] Carl L. Bankston further states not only are we influenced by our environments and the people we make contact with but they also are influenced and

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[1] Albion W. Small, "General Sociology," *American Journal of Sociology* 18, no. 2 (September 1912): 200-214, https://www.Jstor.org/stable/2762860.

[2] University of North Carolina, Department of Sociology-College of Arts and Sciences, "What is Sociology?" http://sociology.unc.edu/undergraduate-program/sociology-major/what-is-sociology/.

[3] Carl L. Bankston, *Series: Magill's Choice* (Pasadena, CA: Salem Press, 2000), 2-3, EBSCOhost- Ebook-web-p-ebscohost-com.dtl.idm.oclc.org.

changed by our behaviors and interactions with these places, individuals, and varied contexts as shown below:

> Sociologists study social life. This means that they concern themselves with the social groups that exist apart from the individuals within them, into which people are born and out of which they die. Sociologists look at how people are influenced by their cultures, by the beliefs, values, and ways of acting that they receive from other members of their group. These social scientists consider how groups transmit cultural traits to individuals through socialization. Sociologists study the ways in which people work together or compete with one another leads to varying consequences for individuals in different social positions. Sociologists examine institutions, and established ways of meeting fundamental human needs through social interaction. Family life, economics, political systems are all institutions that enable people to perform their basic shared tasks. Those who study sociology investigate how individuals involve themselves in the social world through interaction with others and through interpretation of the action of others.[4]

All things considered, it is evident that the discipline of sociology and the utilization of the social learning theory will help shed light on many of the underlying factors that are affecting the disengagement of young adults in the church. Often, we must look deeper into why people are not participating, when for most of their childhood and adolescent years, they were faithful and engaged in the life of the church. Since this field is so broad in the social issues and institutions that it examines, it seeks to address in qualitative and quantitative methods a variety of social questions, and critically analyze all the potential underlying factors of one's decisions or indecision. It is evident that this discipline could assist me with my doctoral ministry project. The beginning stage of my project is to identify factors that led to the disengagement of young adults.

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[4] Bankston, *Series: Magill's Choice*, 2.

What I have noticed in several mainline denominational churches is that there is a disengagement of young adults. The doctoral project will assist me in addressing the problem of young adult disengagement, specifically, those between the ages of eighteen to twenty-seven.

Furthermore, it is not just my congregation; many congregations have noticed the decline of youth and young adults for quite some time, but I believe there is something deeper going on and perhaps it is related to the inner workings of the individual, their internal and external environments, and how they come to find meaning in life. Therefore, I chose the Social Learning Theory to assist me in flushing out the possible issues and possible factors surrounding the young adults' disengagement. Since this theory considers all these factors, it was quite applicable to addressing my problem statement and hypothesis.

Social Learning Theory: Meaning and Definition

Social Learning Theory "is learning that is facilitated by observation of, or interaction with, another individual (or its products).[5] This theory is expansive and can explain why individuals respond in social situations and how they learn. According to the book *Social Learning*, individuals "acquire valuable life skills and knowledge through copying others, and this has been the focus of attention of animal behaviorists dating back to Darwin."[6] Therefore, this theory has the capacity to look at each of the

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[5] William Hoppitt and Kevin N. Laland, *Social Learning: An Introduction to Mechanisms, Methods, and Models* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 2-3, https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt2jc8mh.4.

[6] Hoppitt and Laland, *Social Learning*, 1.

young adult's church experience, contextual factors, social structures, and gain understanding of how the cumulative effect of these factors have led these individuals to disengage from active participation in the church community. Since they may have interacted with other youth in the church in which they have formed close relationships and then they disengaged from church activity, perhaps their friends/associate's disengagement led them to no longer participate. Then a friend then copies or learns another friend's behavior and disengages. In addition to this, there may be issues going on in their households where the parents or a parent may have stopped attending, and this may have led to what social theorists call a "copying or a transmission" of behaviors.

Although Social Learning Theory is utilized across several disciplines, (i.e., anthropology, artificial intelligence, etc.) and proves itself to be discerning in human social behavior and their meaning, it is easy for the meaning of core terms to be transmitted improperly; therefore, many theorists have begun to explain what these preliminary definitions mean before they deploy them. Below are four terms that are used quite often, and they form the backdrop of social learning discussions. These four terms are:

> Social learning is learning that is facilitated by observation of, or interaction with, another individual or its products.
>
> Social transmission occurs when the prior acquisition of a behavior trait T by one individual A, when expressed either directly in the performance of T or in some other behavior associated with T, exerts a lasting positive causal influence on the rate at which another individual, B, acquires and/or performs T.
>
> An innovation is a new or modified learned behavior not previously found in the population.

> A tradition is a distinctive behavior pattern shared by two or more individuals in a social unit that persists over time and that new practitioners acquire in part through socially aided learning. Cultures are those group-typical behavior patterns shared by members of a community that rely on socially learned and transmitted information.[7]

Sociology and Social Learning Theory will serve to help explain the factors that caused the young adults to disengage from church participation and examine the contextual issues and structural dynamics of our local church and denominational polity, yet aid in the development of a relevant six-week seminar as the doctoral ministry project is executed.

Moreover, both sociology and social learning theory align with my strong belief in the third component, "dialogue," of the four-fold typology suggested by Ian Barbour.[8]

The Three-fold Typology

Conflict: Science and religion are always in conflict. Independence-science and religion should be kept in their own separate containers/realms of understanding, and when this is done, there is no conflict.

Dialogue: there are some similarities or commonalities, and when things are not explainable, science can look to religion for dialogue and vice versa.

Integration: there are defined areas where the merging together of processes and thoughts facilitates learning about things we often cannot explain.

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[7] Hoppitt and Laland, *Social Learning*, 4.

[8] Barbour, *When Science Meets Religion*, 2-3.

The component of "dialogue" as examined in Ian Barbour's book, *When Science Meets Religion-Enemies: Strangers, or Partners?*,

> informs us that the mind, will, and emotions are influenced by several factors, and both science, specifically, neuroscience and religion, agree in the importance of self and emotions, just as anthropology and genetics play a role in how one may respond in social situations. The component of dialogue brings to bear the significance of the embodied self and how scientist and theologians do agree on about its influence on the mind, will, and emotions and how these things are key to how individuals react in life. Although, the theologians look 'at these three terms-heart, soul, and mind describing different but overlapping human characteristics rather than distinct components or faculties in a person,' yet how scientists view these components is somewhat different.[99]

Therefore, this component helps us understand how an individual can be informed and formed by scripture and their experiences. They see the importance of all parts – the body, soul, and perception in the mind – not one over the other, as some of the Greeks did in biblical times. Moreover, science and theology agree that individuals have needs and the perception that these must be fulfilled. So, the individual through its sophisticated neurophysiology can construct data that is consistent with their needs, goals, perceptions, and expectations. This supports the reason why young adults respond the way they do when they disengage or how data was received that led to their disengagement.[10]

Furthermore, "dialogue" allows us to fully understand how significant anthropology and the social self is in determining the effects of culture and emotions on one's behavior. Barbour further states that, "in the Bible, we are not

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[9] Hoppitt and Laland, *Social Learning*, 134-135.

[10] Hoppitt and Laland, *Social Learning*, 136.

self-contained individuals; we are constituted by our relationships. We are who we are as children, husbands and wives, parents, citizens, and members of a covenant people. God is concerned about the character of the life of the community as well as the motives and actions of everyone."[11] It is important to note that one should not underestimate the influence of anthropology and the social self and how it infuses the entirety of life according to the "dialogue" component.

> In human life, culture enters the social construction of emotions. Emotional feelings are shaped by cultural meanings learned in infancy and throughout life. When children learn words for emotions and culturally approved behaviors to express them, the emotional experience itself is affected.[12]

This third level of the typology, the discipline of sociology and social learning theory, will provide explanation for some of the reasons for disengagement, yet assist the local church in gaining insight and greater awareness in developing relevant solutions to address the problem of young adult disengagement from the church.

The social learning theory, originated by Albert Bandura, informs each of my foundational papers and provides valuable insight for the development and implementation of my doctoral ministry project. It is evident that the theory informs and provides a framework for the problem that I am addressing in the local church, which is the disengagement of young adults, specifically those between the ages of eighteen to twenty-six years of age. Bandura's theory gives explanation and provides several motivating factors that will lead one to disengage. For example, one journal study in the

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[11] Hoppitt and Laland, *Social Learning*, 137.

[12] Hoppitt and Laland, *Social Learning*, 138.

Review of Religious Research (2019) supports the theory's position by stating "the transition from adolescence to young adulthood often coincides with less religious involvement (Uecker et al. 2007; Petts 2009; Kinnamon and Hawkins 2011)."[13]

Moreover, Bandura's Social Learning Theory asserts that individuals learn by imitation, modeling, or observation. But there are also key factors such as motivation, attitudes, attention, and emotions that affect whether these social learnings do take place.[14] Therefore, based on this theory, young adults do disengage because their circle of influence or friends have already disengaged because they are not motivated loss of connection, the programming is not relevant, the possible rewards and affirmations that they received in the past may no longer be felt or envisioned in the church; therefore, young adults slowly disengage. Generally, these young adults who have grown up in the church and have been integrated into all aspects of the church are so closely knit with other young adults, so one's attitude of wanting to separate from the church tends to influence another's attitude about participation. Also, if their parents, siblings, young adult leaders, or church leaders' attitudes toward church have changed, meaning they see their lack of participation in attending church, then some young adults are more likely to model their behavior and lose their motivation because there was a connection there. As a result, they stop attending and begin to imitate that behavior because that positive reinforcement, motivation, and positive attitude is no longer present within their circle of

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[13] Douglas Jacobs, Douglas Tilstra, Benjamin Finbar, Sharon Pittman, James Hollis, Jerome Thayer, Thandi Klingbeil, Jordan Arellano, and Chelsy Tyler, "Adventists Millennials: Measuring Emerging Adults' Connection to Church," *Review of Religious Research* 61, no 1 (March 2019): 39-56, https://www.jstor.org/stable/45218919.

[14] Kendra Cherry, "How Social Learning Theory Works," October 14, 2022, Very Well Mind, https://www.verywellmind.com/social-learning-theory-2795074.

influence. Thomas P. O' Conner, Dean R. Hoge, and Estrelda Alexander (2002) also observed this phenomenon in their study of 206 young adults from three different denomination: Baptist, Methodist, and Catholic. They assert that "Social Learning Theory views religious behavior as a learned behavior arising out of a particular life context. As life contexts change, people change, primarily by observing role models and practicing new behaviors (Bandura 1977). Thus, early socialization into a religious tradition is a result of the model provided to children by parents and other adults. (Hunsberger 1983; Hoge, Johnson, and Luidens 1993)."[15] They state further that:

> In the teenage years when peer influences tend to outweigh parental influences, teenagers will become less church involved as they learn new behaviors from their peers that help relate them to their changing situations. Similarly, as an adult, a person's own set of attitudes, beliefs, and values and those of his or her adult friends will influence that person's religious and church involvement. Social Learning Theory would suggest that religious learning will vary from one denomination, religious group, or another depending on the kind of religious modeling and practices that are most prevalent in each group.[16]

Just as the theory offers reasons as to why young adults have engaged, the theory also proves I can use the factors of motivation, positive attitude, and reinforcement as part of the project's development to re-engage young adult back into meaningful participation in the life of the church. This will provide new insight about the importance of relevant young adult ministry program development.

Second, the social learning theory informs my Biblical Foundations chapter because the Apostle Paul's relationship with a much younger Timothy directly

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[15] Thomas P. O'Connor, R. Hoge, and Estrelda Alexander, "The Relative Influence of Youth and Adult Experiences on Personal Spirituality and Church Involvement," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 41, no. 4 (December 2002): 723-732, https:// www. Jstor.org/stable/1387486.

[16] O'Connor, Hoge, and Alexander, "The Relative Influence of Youth and Adult Experiences on Personal Spirituality and Church Involvement," 723-732.

correlates to all the aspects of Bandura's theory which states that people learn new behaviors and attitudes by observing and imitating the behaviors of others. In the Book of Acts we witness how the Apostle Paul and Timothy's relationship developed early on when the Apostle encountered a much younger Timothy in his hometown of Lystra (Acts 16.1). Although Timothy was already exhibiting very strong Christian values, disciplined living, and came from a strong spiritual heritage from his mother and grandmother, Paul was so impressed that he wanted to further instruct Timothy. Paul was persistent and made it known that he wanted to have Timothy serve alongside him as his disciple in missionary work. By doing this, he would further mentor and shape Timothy's leadership skills as a young adult. So, on Paul's second missionary journey, the young Timothy joined him and the two did ministry together ministering and equipping the churches that Paul founded. It was through Paul's indelible marks of apostleship, modeling of faith, value driven leadership, and grounded righteous actions that Timothy was mentored. Both principal factors of the theory were present — motivation, reward, attitude these things would make his likelihood of learning and transformation possible.

Biblical Foundation Intersection

In the selected pericope of my Biblical Foundations text, 2 Timothy 3:1-17, we see how Paul encourages the younger Timothy to continue the work and remain steadfast. Paul points out that he is aware of the perilous times: people being lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, arrogant, abusers, disobedient to their parents,

ungrateful, and all sorts of reprobate behaviors.[17] Paul even warned Timothy of Jannes and Jambres who were individuals that had corrupt minds and counterfeit faith and for him to be aware of them, so he would not be led astray by them or become like them. There was so much that Timothy had to contend with in the church and community, yet Paul gave himself as a relevant example of a person who had gone through persecution, death threats, thrown in prison for the work of the Gospel, had been beaten on several occasions, but he wanted him to remember all that he had suffered but also the sound Christian principles and living that he had witness in him. So, he told Timothy to hold on and emulate all that he had observed, been taught, and that he had modeled before him. By doing this he would learn how to persevere in the ministry as a young pastor. In this passage the Apostle Paul is towards the end of his own ministry journey, and he is a more mature and seasoned.

So, it seemed as if he is passing the torch to his beloved companion in the ministry. Because of the process of observation, the internalization from the teaching, modeling, learning, reinforcement, and encouragement, from Paul, Timothy continues in the ministry. Therefore, it was expected that Timothy would imitate Paul's action, thus learning how to be steadfast in his Christian living, faith, and fighting for the truth of the Gospel.

Historical Foundation Intersection

Third, the Historical Foundations chapter further supported my hypothesis in that if we develop a six-week seminar for the laity leadership and young adults, then they

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[17] 2 Timothy 3:1-9, NRSV.

will be empowered to develop a model that re-engages the young adult back into the local church. This new model will provide insight and awareness about the reasons for young adult disengagement and put forth strategies for re-engagement. This foundations' chapter dealt with the Industrial Era, which was a time of economic growth and transition for the world because of the movement from an agrarian society to an industrial nation to a fast-moving commercialized nation which brought with it several problems: long hours from factory work and young people displaced because of the industrialization. Young men transitioned to a whole new way of life, to survival on the streets with no structured activity to replace what was lost, change in the nuclear structure of the family, women emerging in the workforce, and there were no social structures in place to address the displacement. George Williams lived during this time and experienced this displacement but was taken in as a young apprentice. George working as a young apprentice saved him from a life of crime, waywardness, and the drunkenness that young boys encountered on the streets of London. This saving grace and his divine encounter with God led him to start a place for boys to provide them with lifelong values, structure, disciplined living, and a pathway that would change their trajectory. The Social Learning Theory was evident in the way that Williams provided the boys with a living model of how to properly exist in the world, taught them appropriate values which corrected their behavior, and facilitated them living a sustainable life. In addition to this, Williams provided them a place where they could gather, continually observe positive behaviors, and receive reinforcement and empowerment and growth as young men. This enabled the young men to live a valued life and be a transformative citizen to society. Over time, Williams' vision evolved into

a prominent organization which no longer existed for just young men but it would also include young women. These same appropriate behaviors and values for living a sustainable life continued to be passed on and the organization grew because of the faithful teaching, modeling, transmission, and reinforcement of the core values of the YMCA. Even today, the organization is still meeting the needs of the entire family and providing a safe place for young people to be equipped mentally, physically, and spiritually for sustainable and meaningful life regardless of race, religion, class, or gender. The programming today continues to include wholistic programming that focuses on the macro-sociological problems of the day: poverty, education, crime, juvenile delinquency, health care, affordable housing, after-school care, abuse and so much more.

Social Learning Theory Intersection with the Theological Foundation

Fourth, the Social Learning Theory (SLT) intersects with my Theological Foundations chapter which undergirds my project through two theological constructs: ecclesiology and practical theology. All of these theological constructs call for the church – the body of Christ – to live out the Gospel of Jesus Christ with intentionality and particularity. What I mean by this, is that the church cannot just teach principles of faith, equity, justice, love, and forgiveness; the church must continue to ask themselves what does love, justice, forgiveness, and equity look like for us in the public square. In addition to this, these theological constructs all require positive role models who are the teachers, prophets, pastors, evangelists, and laity who will demonstrate Christian behaviors that exemplify the fruit of the spirit and consistency in internal (church) and

external (community) behaviors so that young adults can visualize principled, disciplined, and Christian behaviors they can emulate. When the young people show up in their respective classes or regular learning places where there is feedback, reinforcement, and praise (reward), they are more likely to internalize them and begin to model these behaviors and appropriate them into their repertoire of daily living. They have arrived at the SLT which explains how people learn and acquire behaviors through observation, imitation, and modeling of others. This theory also asserts that having positive feedback,reinforcement, and rewards assist in shaping and transforming behaviors.

The church in its ecclesiology (the role and work of the church) is not only called to the duties of the "Great Commission" to go ye therefore and make disciples, but to engage the members in the use of their spiritual gifts to equip the church for ministry that is liberating and transforms their lives and the community. Moreover, it challenges the church to be relevant and apply its principles, beliefs, and theological methods to the everyday life for all their parishioners.

Through practical theology, the church will have officers and laity within the church who must teach, demonstrate the right attitude and perspective, and then implement leadership and training, outreach and community engagement, social justice, diversity, and equity programs which extend outward into the community to bring about change. Through the congregation's young adult discipleship plan, they will begin to observe, imitate, and model the behaviors put forth in their local church. As they continue to mature in their discipleship, they will continue to have feedback and reinforcement that will lead to them emulating and internalizing these behaviors into

their young adults' lives. When these two theological constructs are the lens from which young adult re-engagement is reclaimed and reinvented, then new behaviors will be internalized and emulated, thus re-engaging our young adults in the ministry of the church in new and meaningful ways. The social learning theory helps us understand how positive and transformative behaviors are learned, but it also helps one understand some of the factors that have led to the negative and positive behaviors that our young adults emulate — considering that they were baptized and active in the church for most of their younger years (up until seventeen or eighteen years of age).

In addition to this, Ian G. Barbour also stresses how there are also scientific factors that are present in the process of taking on new behaviors and internalizing them. Science has proven in the third component of the typology-dialogue, that "information can alsobe transmitted between generations not only by genes and parental example, but also in speech, literature, art, music and other cultural forms."[18] Considering this newfound revelation by scientist and supported by theologians, it is evident that behaviors can be transmitted and learned through a variety of ways. Moreover, my thinking about the development of my project survey questions also changed because now I must take into consideration that genetics, the symbolic interpretations that individuals create to make sense of their environmental learnings and their cultural interpretation, also influence their decisions to disengage. The factors causing the young adult's disengagement from the local church and their discipleship really are greater than I had imagined.

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[18] Barbour, *When Science Meets Religion*, 107.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is evident that the discipline of sociology is critical to understanding why young adults disengage from the life of the congregation. Sociology paves the way for one to look deeper into the social dynamics that influence the individual daily as well as the context of the learned behavior. Whereas other disciplines may look at the mental condition or childhood trauma of the individual that has shaped their behavior and growth from childhood to young adulthood, sociology looks from various angels and seeks to find how these factors interact cumulatively to affect one's behavior. Moreover, the discipline of sociology supports Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory as a useful theoretical construct to help explain how behaviors are learned and incorporated as their own behaviors by children, youth, and young adults. It further helps to explain why the young adults disengage when programming is not relevant, meaningful, and supportive of their learned values and belief systems. Even though research shows that this is not uncommon in this age group (eighteen to twenty-seven) it still calls for the church leaders to assess what are the factors that have led to this exit from the church, especially when one has been so engaged for at least ten or more years of their life.

The Social Learning Theory further supported the other foundation papers – Biblical, Historical and Theological Foundations – that are part of my doctoral project.In looking at the Biblical Foundations chapter, the relationship between the seasoned Paul and the younger Timothy provides a concrete example of the Social Learning Theory being realized. Paul takes Timothy on as a young adult and begins to teach him through repetitive and consistent Christian values, gospel teaching, demonstration of right

behaviors through good times and hardship, and consistent feedback and reward for right behavior was also present. Therefore, the behavior was emulated and appropriated by Timothy. This in turn helped Timothy to not be discouraged and leave, but to continue in the pastoral ministry. He was challenged to go forth and bring to bear all that he was raised up in since he was young. One can see that Timothy kept the faith and remembered all that he had been taught and persevered.

As we turn to the Historical Foundations chapter that deals with the Industrial Era, it was a time of upheaval and transition. It was George Williams, the founder of the Young Men's Christian Association, whose God given vision saved the lives of countless young men. Although America evolved and people began to enjoy the finer things in life, and we saw the emergence of factory life, the mass production of textiles, automobiles, the rise of big business, better jobs, and greater economic opportunity, yet no one considered the great impact this industrialization and fast-paced change would have on the young people. Not to mention the systemic issues that would come about for those with a lower social economic status and were displaced due to the transition from an agrarian society to industry. So, with this era came all kind of systemic social ills and the birth of social reform programs that were designed to help alleviate the burden on the weakest of society — our young people. Williams' young organization continues to serve as a beacon of hope for young men by teaching Christian values that young people would hold to throughout their life. The YMCA regularly provided a place for these young men to be mentored properly to become good citizens, taught leadership skills, and right values. Because they met regularly, these principles were emulated and incorporated as their own, and this

changed the trajectory of many of their lives. Today the YMCA has expanded its vision, and it provides these same consistent principles to men, women, children, and young adults. So, through Social Learning Theory, one learns new behavior through observation, modeling, and imitation. The YMCA is a prime example of how you can change a person's whole life by teaching, mentoring, and by being that living example of what is expected or what is appropriate behavior. Through consistent feedback, reinforcement, and rewards, it transformed these young men's lives forever.

In the Theological Foundations chapter, Social Learning Theory informs the waythe church does its ministry in the world and how it will do its work to young adults specifically. As Social Learning Theory relates to liberation theology, it will seek to engage our young adults to learn from their church leaders and mentors how to be about social justice and to see themselves as agents of change living out the transformative Gospel of Jesus Christ, especially since Jesus was about social justice. They can do this by alleviating suffering, changing unjust systems, protesting in their cities, dismantling racism, and rallying for environmental justice in poor neighborhoods. Therefore, the church must provide teachers and mentors who will model the change agent ethos withinthe local church; then this will help young people to re-engage with the church.

In addition to ecclesiology, I also selected practical theology to support my hypothesis that if we can identify some of the factors causing disengagement, then we can put together a six-week seminar that will re-engage young adults back into the local church. The church can be revived causing young adults to re-engage and continue their lifelong discipleship in the church. We have witnessed the church being active in the

world and have seen its global impact through moving upon the hearts of Christians who were engaged in transformative movements like the Civil Rights Movement, the Black Lives Matter Movement, Gun Control Movement, the Poor People's Campaign, and other Social Reform Movements. I believe when the church, in its ecclesiology and practical theology, begins to fully commit itself to address the issues that young adults are encountering, then it will influence the re-engagement of young adults back into the local church. They in turn will see the church has created space for them and are serious about re-engaging them in relevant ways that minister to their sense of belonging and brings meaning to something that is important to their emerging life as a young adult. The church is not just this spiritual institution that we teach about, but the church, the Apostle Paul states, is the body of Christ. We have been given a mandate "to go therefore and make disciples of Jesus Christ."[19] This mandate calls for us to go out, teach, do, and put into practice all the roles of the church by utilizing the gifts of all people. We must teach, model, and allow these principles and behaviors to be emulated and internalized, and this will bring forth the new life and sustaining behavior that we are looking for. Additionally, Social Learning Theory informs the church's ecclesiology by teaching the church that the environment of the church and its being makes it a place that safely nurtures one's growth, empowers young people, and promotes principled Christian values. This will lead to a strong sense of being and one's lifelong service and commitment to the church.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

This doctoral ministry project originated from the synergy of the contextual analysis which showed a church and community full of young adults, (ages eighteen to twenty-seven), yet they were disengaged. This problem statement piqued my curiosity regarding what factors may have caused disengagement and what ministry model might lead to re-engagement. It was the spiritual autobiography paper which drew light upon my own formation of being discipled, mentored, and being selected as a young leader to teach young people. Moreover, I believe it was these factors, faithful role models in the church and my family role models, which led to my life-long engagement in the church, even though my young adult years. These special relationship of church and family members led me to design the research project with the inclusion of the laity of the congregation and young adults who were engaged and disengaged.

This chapter synthesizes all the foundational work completed prior to the project research as well as the research project itself. It seeks to elucidate on the connection points from start and finish then conclude with a summary of learnings. Each foundational chapter brought to bear a particular aspect of the research project while supporting the problem statement or hypothesis. For instance, the spiritual autobiography showed how a young adult's life can be filled with difficult challenges, but they are still vital to the church. Churches must re-examine their role and function — which is its

living ecclesiology. This paper also showed how important faith formation is and how we can keep young adults engaged by having mentorship available in churches. Secondly, the Biblical Foundations chapter examines the selected text of 2 Timothy 3:1-17. The focal verses that coincide with the project are verses fourteen through fifteen. These verses state, "But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from who you learned it, and how from your childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus."[1] This text shows a special relationship between a mentor and protégé that started from Timothy's youth and how Paul further assisted him as he grew in the Lord and faced challenges as a young leader of the church. Third, the historical chapter provided evidence for when the world is challenged with social problems that impact and disenfranchise our young people, social agencies like the church rise and provide fresh models for dealing with young adult disengagement from society and the good things in life. Also, the theological chapter puts forth a way to help the context deal with its problem and find new pathways to re-engage young adults back into the discipleship program, recognize and utilize their gifts, and help move the church forward to fulfill the great commission. And finally, the interdisciplinary chapter showed how we can take an integrative approach, collaborate, and use a variety of disciplines to arrive at solutions to the challenges to the church and world. From all of this a project model was implemented that imported all the five insights into the project. Young people have gifts to lead the church; you can continue in the work by holding fast to what you been taught, learned, and believed since you were a child; the church must use practical theology to find new

[1] 2 Timothy 3:14-15, NRSV.

pathways forward for re-engagement and revisit their ecclesiology; and use an integrative approach of religion, social sciences, theory, theology, and experience to arrive at answers to present-day solutions. These points of connection were each placed throughout the research project through focus group discussion, journaling, teachings of the day, or the instruments that were used throughout the project.

From this wealth of work, it became evident that young adult disengagement is a multi-layered problem and through this three-year process of theological work, it blossomed into this passion and burden on my heart for young adults, their voice, gifts, witness, and vitality they bring to the church. It became evident that when we have a burden on our hearts like the Apostle Paul or like George Williams, we can meet young adults where they are and offer them a place alongside us to help us in this great kingdom work in new and relevant ways. We must reclaim them for the sake of the work of the kingdom and for the witness of the church today.

Overall, this project is a case to deal with the myths surrounding young adults and their disengagement from the church. It is also an invitation for the church to continue to break new ground for this ever-changing engagement with young adults.[2] It is my hope that this project has provided pertinent details of the methodology used, implementation style, a summary of learnings, implications for the future, and concluding thoughts about new insights.

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[2] Barna Research Archives, "Five Myths about Young Adult Dropouts," November 15, 2011, https://www.barna.com/research/five-myths-about-young-adult-church-dropouts/.

Methodology

The methodology used for this qualitative research project was grounded in the model of mentoring that were exhibited by the Apostle Paul to Timothy and George Williams and the YMCA to young adult men. These relationships and their model for instruction were detailed in the Biblical and Historical Foundations chapters and demonstrated how young adults learn and stay engaged when there are strong role models, structured learning, passionate mentors, one-on-one discussions, and guidance as one deals with life's challenges. Therefore, they serve as a representation of the type of dialogue that the research study seeks to have as we re-engage young adults and find out contributing factors to their disengagement. Considering this dialogue, along with gleaning on the relationships from my two theological topics, I chose a six-week seminar as my format to test my hypothesis, and engage in listening, learning, observation, and engagement.

Research Model and Participants

The research model included three types of participants: young adults who had dis-engaged from worship, young adults who were engaged in worship, and the lay leadership of the congregation. I believed that by having both young adults and the lay leadership, I could arrive at a depth of solutions for re-engagement and build a ministry model that included the voice, ideas, and gifts of the young adults. Therefore, I recruited the participants utilizing a variety of methods. I solicited people from my congregation by placing an information table with a white board reading "Come Join the Research Project: Young Adult Re-engagement," and included event flyers (see Appendix A) and

the sign-up sheet on the table. I placed information and specific details about the research project in the church's July and August edition of the church newsletter and sent emails to young adults who were engaged and had disengaged from the discipleship programming and the lay leadership. From my recruitment efforts, there were eleven individuals that signed up to take part in the study, but two dropped out due to work schedules. Therefore, I began the research project with nine participants on September 2, 2023, and completed it on October 7, 2023. The age range of the project's participants were between eighteen and seventy-nine years of age. There were four young adults and five lay person in leadership.

In designing the study, I initially had planned to meet at the church for all six sessions of the seminar. However, in talking with some of my contextual associates and peer associate, they brought to light some very important facts about the busyness of young adults, the looming presence of Covid 19 in our communities, and the convenience of virtual platforms and that I should consider going with virtual seminars. I considered their advisement and compromised; instead of going with an all-virtual seminar, I felt a strong. need to have some engagement at the church. The first and last session were at the church and session two through five were on Zoom. The design included three points for gathering data; they were the pre- and post-test questionnaires (see Appendix C), focused journaling (see Appendix F), and focused group discussions. Each of these methods would help me as the researcher to arrive at answers relevant to the problem statement which states young adults have disengaged from the church while proving the hypothesis.

Instruments Utilized for the Research Study

Additionally, I wanted to employ a variety of instruments to help identify the factors causing disengagement and what could possibly help with engagement; so, I decided to use the following:

1. The United Methodist Church Board of Discipleship Gifts Inventory (online inventory of eighty questions). This instrument allowed the participants to find out their top three spiritual gifts, learn what these three spiritual gifts look like in the body of Christ, and affirm that all of our parts of the body of Christ have gifts given by the Holy Spirit and can assist in equipping the church for ministry (see Appendix E).
2. Focused journaling questions for the participants to take home and reflect on each week after the seminar teaching each day. These questions would allow for the participants to begin to realize what their present attitudes about young adults are, issues of church leadership, ecclesiology, and practices that help keep people engaged in the church's discipleship programming (see Appendix F).
3. Pre-Questionnaire would help to establish a baseline of their attitudes, beliefs and general observations regarding young adult disengagement, spiritual gifts, role models, mentors, and new ideas about ministry models (see Appendix C).
4. Post Questionnaire would help confirm whether there were changes in thoughts, ideas, and were they empowered to develop this new ministry model, participate more fully, and re-engage in new ways (see Appendix D).
5. Focused Group discussions: These groups allowed for three individuals per group to dialogue about a life issue or question affecting the church or the lives of the

body of Christ. It allowed for an open dialogue, close listening, and for an awareness of different and similar views although the participants were from different generations (see Appendix F).

Anticipated Impact on Participants

Considering the research design and the participants that were involved, there were several impactful things that I hoped the project would change. First, I hoped that that this type of study which utilized both young and older adults would help break down the long-held beliefs in the church that these two groups cannot dialogue together and arrive at viable solutions that benefit all those involved. Secondly, I wanted the participants to really see the value of having mentoring relationships in the church. We tend to have these relationships outside of the church but are not intentional about this being included in our discipleship programming for the church. I lifted Apostle Paul's and Timothy's relationship and the YMCA's historical and present-day model as key examples of where mentoring makes a difference. So, I hope they would notice the importance of this relationship and seek to include this in their model and additionally, seek out their mentor or protégé within the church. This could lead to the young adult' re-engagement in renewed ways. Third, through the journaling, I was looking for all to understand and begin to employ the spiritual discipline of journaling as a means of reflection, self-awareness, and helping all the participants have a meaningful practice for letting out those joys, concerns, and unspeakable life challenges.

Implementation of Project

In this section of the project analysis, you will find the process of implementation that I used during the research project. It entails the initial steps I completed before the research study commenced. Also, it provides an overview of each week of the seminar and which instruments were utilized each week to gather relevant data for the hypothesis. This ended with how the data was collected from each participant according to the guidelines of the approved Institutional Review Board (IRB) of United Theological Seminary.

Initial Steps

There were several steps that were taken before the project was implemented on September 2, 2023. Since I began the recruitment process in July and left the sign up open until that day, I decided to have at least fifteen-minute phone conversations or send an email once they committed to join. This short conversation or email involved me telling them the about the study being a young adult re-engagement study, and that I wanted to include participants who were young adults eighteen to thirty years of age and those who were in some sort of lay leadership role at the church. Then I explained the time frame for the six-week seminar, the problem statement, my hypothesis, and then provided them with a copy of the consent form (see Appendix B). I believed these conversations added a personal touch and provided a nice way to put the participants at ease and thank them for participating. Also, it was my hope that the participants would review this form and complete it prior to the project's commencement date. All but one

informed consent forms were turned in prior to the project start date, and one was returned on the start day of the project.

The Participants

The participants were a great representation of the congregation. The congregation has fifty-seven members on the church's membership rolls. The participants for the young adult re-engagement research project ranged in age from eighteen to seventy-nine years of age. The participants very diverse in age, work occupations, and all have graduated from high school, most have attended an accredited college or trade school, and two individuals have an advanced degree. Moreover, there were four young adult participants and five adults who served in lay leadership role of the church. Although, I started out with a list of fifteen young adults who are on the church's membership roll, only four of them responded through the announcement in the church newsletter, the sign-up table, or from the initial calls I made to the list of the fifteen on the church's membership rolls. There are five that are active in some capacity but the others are inactive. The young adult participants include those who are active and inactive. All the adults are active and present in the life of the church.

Contextual and Professional Associates

The contextual associates and professional associates helped in varied ways. The contextual associates met in the initial stages to assist me in discern a project model that would help us find meaningful ways to re-engage young adults. They were very enthusiastic about the project and the thought of having young adults engaged in the

discipleship program would be great but a challenge to our church. So, some of them provided ideas about the structure of the research project, the type of session (virtual or in-person), and three of them were participants in the research project. They also helped recruit and spread the word to the congregation and disengaged young adults. One contextual associate ensured that the information was communicated in the newsletters and the church leadership board. I believe their enthusiasm about the research project help garner support and build enthusiasm about the church having a new young adult ministry model.

Two of the professional associates were helpful by asking me reflective questions that pertained to the design of the research project because they wanted to ensure the questions and data points could provide me with the data that was needed to prove my hypothesis. This proved to be very helpful. They also helped to confirm that having a virtual and in-person format would be more convenient and safer for all parties involved. Due to their professorship teaching schedules and pastoral duties, they were not able to participate in the research project.

Weekly Seminar Overview

Week 1: September 2nd

This week included the formal welcome, an overview of the Young Adult Re-engagement Research Project (which entailed me repeating the dates of the study), attendance requirements for the study, the confidentiality of the information shared, and handing in consent forms. This first day consisted of three essential parts:

Part one included sharing an excerpt from the book, *Faith for Exiles: 5 Ways for a New Generation to Follow Jesus in Digital Babylon*, which discussed clear facts about young adult drop outs from church and that in "2019 that rate was sixty-four percent, but there also are ten percent who stay and remain resilient."[3] I lifted this truth up to the participants because I wanted them to know there is hope and that there are those young adults who do hold on and remain steadfast in their engagement with the church.

Part two included the participants being given the pre-questionnaire survey and asked to complete it. It took most of them twenty minutes to complete the questionnaire. Then each of them was asked to place these in a basket at the front of the room.

Part three include me handing each of them a piece of paper with the focused journal question and then passing each of them out and asking them to reflect and respond to the focused journal question I passed out. They were also informed to keep their journals until the end of the project and turn them in on the last day, October 7th. The seminar ended with a question-and-answer period, but there were no questions.

Week 2: September 9th

The second seminar session focused on our theological grounding and biblical model for young adult engagement and re-engagement. This session was held on the virtual Zoom platform, and we utilized three Zoom platform break-out rooms for the participants. By having the breakout rooms, this provided an opportunity for the young adults and lay leadership to listen to one another and begin to build rapport. After the

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[3] David Kinnaman and Matt Matlock, *Faith for Exiles: 5 Ways for a New Generation to Follow Jesus in Digital Babylon* (Ada, MI: Baker Books, 2019), 3-11, https://www.barna. com/research/resilient-disciples/.

welcome, I asked the participants to listen as I read the text of 2 Timothy 3:1-17 and told them to focus on verses 14 and 15 which states, "But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ."[4] Then, I explained to them the historical background of Paul and Timothy's special relationship as mentor and protégé and spiritual father and son. I further explained how important these relationships are when you are growing up in the church and go on to engage in church leadership. I explained how Timothy was able to observe, emulate, and copy the behaviors of his beloved mentor and spiritual father, and this is often what is needed in the local church to assist young adults in staying engaged in the discipleship programming. After this part, I then broke the groups up into three Zoom rooms where they engaged in discussion on the question of the day. They reconvened and the groups shared their collective responses with everyone to hear what the other thought and their experiences. Then the participants were given their second journal reflection question and asked to reflect and respond to it in their journal. There was a question-and-answer period, but there were no questions.

Week 3: September 16th

The focus of this week was to deal with the historical roots of why young adults disengage from contextual experiences and life? Is this due to all kinds of social ills and challenges that they are facing or are there deeper issues? On this day we looked at historical models which were developed to address the same problems we are faced with

[4] 2 Timothy 3:14-15, NRSV.

today. Therefore, the group learned about the history of the YMCA and how their successful model aided in re-engaging young adult males earlier in their history, but later they evolved to include all people. I explained how this model included mentorship, principle living with values being taught, church services and devotion, and provided structure in their daily lives. After this learning, the group broke off into three Zoom room breakouts. The participants discussed the focus group question, and then reported back to the whole group. Following this, the participants learned about the importance of spiritual gifts and that everyone has a spiritual gift, and they were each asked to go online and complete the Spiritual Gifts Inventory provided by Discipleship Ministries of the United Methodist Church. They were to find out their top three spiritual gifts. There was a question-and-answer section, but there were no questions.

Week 4: September 23rd

This week the focus was to learn and look through the lens of ecclesiology and practical theology and see how these frameworks can help us to arrive at viable solutions to our disengagement of young adults by revisiting the ecclesiology of our churches and by doing adaptive work and using practical theology to find strategies that will help our young adults re-engage. Also, the participants learned about the basics of the discipline of sociology and how it considers the individual and its context and how both influence the other, and how it helps individuals interpret what is relevant and meaningful and what is not. The second part of this day included learning about the Albert Bandura Model-Social Learning Theory and how it can be used to explain some of the disengagement but also help with re-engagement if we include mentoring in our ministry model. Lastly, the

participants were given their journal question for today on a sheet of paper and asked to take this home and reflect and respond on it in their journals.

Week 5: September 30th

The session this week was held on the Zoom virtual platform. This week's focus was to look at our church's context and notice that there are fifteen young adults that are not engaged in the church's discipleship program. We named factors that may have caused this such as our family is not attending church, our peers do not attend church, health issues, Covid 19, mental health, socioeconomic status, and so many more other factors. I also discussed with the group that our community is eighty-nine percent African American; ninety percent of our population is on free or reduced lunch; and our crime rates are just as high as the city's crime rate. Since we know all these things, perhaps we can develop a new ministry model that deals with these issues. Also, Albert Bandura's social learning theory is one tool that can provide us with a strategy and solutions to the problem. This theory of Albert Bandura is heavily focused on the importance of role models along with the emulating of our parents, peers, mentors, teachers, and behaviors. Social learning theory demonstrates that when there are observation and guidance – along with feedback – behaviors are picked up as meaningful to that individual (young adult); then these behaviors are copied.

Then I brought forth a young adult re-engagement ministry model that included five components that allowed for variety and many entry points for entry and re-engagement back into the church's discipleship program: mentoring, niche bible studies centered around purpose and your place in the world, affinity group for belonging, young

adult worship service, and social justice in the community. Then the group broke up into their three Zoom rooms and discussed the day's focus group question which was: "what would be meaningful to you such as a niche bible study." The group led with this question, but there were other questions and ideas that were presented. Once the group came back together, we discussed the group's consensus. The participants looked at two fresh expressions models: one church utilized an app to engage its young adults as well as provide relevant discipleship programming; it is called GAP Central. Secondly, we discussed two other young adult emerging models that include young adult worship services weekly. These services are led by the young adults. There was a brief time for question and answers and there were no questions.

Week 6: October 7th

The last session was held in person at the local church. I provided a simple. overview of what we had accomplished each week and asked the group if there were any questions, and there were no questions for today. Then all the participants were handed the post-survey questionnaire and asked to complete it. This took about twenty-five minutes for all of them to complete it. After this was completed, I provided each of the participants with a tentative timeline of what I hoped our next steps would entail. This included an analysis of the data, a creation of a report of results for the participants, completion of my dissertation paper, the defense of my dissertation, anticipated graduation date, and hosting the church's first preliminary gathering to develop a new ministry model for young adult re-engagement. Lastly, I thanked all the participants for

their faithful participation and asked them to place their journals in a basket on the table next to their completed post-questionnaires.

Summary of Learnings

In this section there will be different types of data presented from the instruments that were used during the young adult re-engagement seminar. Each of these instruments assisted me in proving my hypothesis. The three data points were the pre- and post-survey questionnaire, the focused journaling, and focus group discussions. After the implementation process was completed, I gathered all the data and did an analysis which is listed throughout this section of the paper. I will provide a summary here.

Pre and Post Questionnaire

Some of the questions that were asked:

1) Are you actively engaged in regular worship attendance? Why or why not?
2) What factors do you think have led to your disengagement or the disengagement of young adults (between the ages of 18-27) from active church attendance and programming?
3) What would you include if you were to create and innovative young adult discipleship ministry to re-engage this group?

Results from the Pre-Questionnaire showed the following results:

Participant	Disengagement/ Engagement #1	Factors #2	Innovative Things #3	Practices #4
YAR1A	No	Wanting to do something different	Fun Events, Worship	Church Prayer Giving

			Hang out with age group	Baptism
YAR2A	No	Moving, College	Chat groups Facebook groups, Events	Prayer Bible Reading Connection
YAR3A	No	Not sure	Activities for everyone	Focus on positive Self -care
YAR4A	Yes	Gender issues, church on social media, church hurt	Great music Open dialogue Fun Events	Devotion Music Bible Reading
YAR5B	Yes	Covid Connection is hard. Not relevant	Q & A Informal Bible Studies. Social Media platforms for engagement	Prayer Bible Study Being part of a ministry.
YAR6B	Yes	Lazy	More music must be included.	None
YAR7B	Yes	Length of Worship. Relevance No input	Listen to them. Take their advice seriously.	Prayer Reading Bible Reading Christian Books
YAR8B	Yes	Busy. Do not see value. Relevance	Hear from them first about what activities.	Active engagement in Christian service. Active participation in a church community.
YAR9B	Yes	Other interests Church has not been an influence.	Fun events. Invite their input to encourage them.	Prayer Be of service

Continuation of pre-survey questionnaire responses

Participant	Critical individual in spiritual journey #5	Introduction to the church #6	Young Adults Importance #7	The Body of Christ and Spiritual Gifts #8

YAR1A	Parents, pastor, And Grandmother	Parents	They can teach older adults' new things.	We all have spiritual gifts.
YAR2A	Pastor, parents, grandmothers, mentors	Parents	They can help the church do more. They can teach new things.	They are given by the Holy Spirit. We all have spiritual gifts.
YAR3A	Self-motivated	Mother	They are important but they need guidance.	It's how you follow your calling.
YAR4A	Parents, pastor, family, and church	Grandmother Mother	They bring awareness about what is needed.	The church is one body with different members. Spiritual gifts vary.
YAR5B	Pastor, son, and mother	Mother and grandmother	To bridge the gap and spark interest for them to grow in their journey.	The of Christ is the active person seeking to serve. Spiritual gifts are one's unique abilities.
YAR6B	My parents, pastor	Parents	Helps the church grow.	The body of Christ is the people. Unsure about spiritual gifts.
YAR7B	Pastor, seasoned saints	Cousins	They are the future of the church.	They are within you. Tap into them.
YAR8B	Engaging Pastors and loving members	Grandmother and mother	To help them avoid feeling disconnected, overwhelmed, and powerless.	We are all part of the body of Christ and have special abilities to help make the body complete.
YAR9B	Sunday School Teacher	Mother	They are the future leaders. They reflect	Spiritual gifts are the tools the able body

			our dreams and hopes.	brings to help others.
Total: 9				

The pre survey questionnaire results served as a base line and showed the following:

1. Young adults are disengaged at a higher level than adults in the questionnaire.

2. The factors that led to disengagement are many but there is commonality between young adult and adults in the areas of relevance, worship length and style, and difference in values/personal perspectives.

3. Both groups share commonalities in the need to be creative and do something new and have social media platforms. Young adults often cited doing something fun and having open dialogue or chat groups.

4. Both groups had practices that help them stay committed to their Christian life. The top three practices were: prayer, Bible reading, and connection with other Christians.

5. Both groups agreed that having someone alongside them helped them in their spiritual journey. The top three responses were their pastor, parents, and church members.

6. The introduction to the church was generally by their parent or grandparents. This proved to be consistent across both groups.

7. There was consistency across both groups that young adults are beneficial to the church and their ministry is vital. Both adults and young adults agreed that they can help by teaching us new things, bridge the gap, and help us to carry out the work of ministry.

8. Most of the participants have a general understanding of the body of Christ and what spiritual gifts are and that everyone has a spiritual gift.

The Post-Survey Questionnaire

The results of the post-survey questionnaire had some marked changes from two of the participants. The other participants' responses were consistent with their pre-survey questionnaire responses. The two individuals with marked changes had these

differences: one participant recommended the affinity groups and the app for innovative ideas to re-engage the young adults. This was part of the teaching in the seminar, and it was hands on. I invited them to go to the app and look at how it was engaging the young adults. Secondly, the other participant who is engaged virtually stated that their goal is to start going in person. They also had very creative ideas about re-engaging the young adults and being in discussion with other church goers.

Focused Journaling

Question #1

This question showed that all the participants are sensitive to young adults and how the established church may have treated them in the past. All but one participant felt sad by the way the young adult was talked to. There were four of the eight participants who stated that this treatment would have made them consider dis-engaging from the church if they were a member because it showed that they were not interested in helping or including the young adults in the ministry.

Question #2

The participant responded in a variety of ways to these questions. However, four of the participants understood that their church is dominated by older people and there are very few active young adults or youth. However, others stated it was still their church, and you can still do ministry and carry out God's mission.

Question #3

This question focused on what peaked the participants' interests and kept them fulfilled and busy? All the participants had some type of interest or church involvement that kept them busy and engaged in meaningful ways and served as outlets.

Question #4

The responses to this question regarding "person Y" not knowing how to start serving in the church focused on a strategy or way we could help individuals begin serving in their church. All the participants provided one of the three options: take a spiritual gifts inventory, ask the pastor, or start by volunteering in various areas at the church. Each of them was sensitive to the needs of the young adult and was able to provide a pathway for "person Y" to engage in Christian service at the church.

Question #5

This question demonstrated that there are a variety of factors that hinder us from participating in church and its activities. There was no marked difference between the two subgroups — young adults and adults. Please see the list below.

- Work
- Sports
- Overly busy
- Need rest-tired
- Finances
- Church hurt
- Overwhelmed with life problems
- My personal preferences
- Several factors, factors changed as I grew up into adulthood
- Inward focused church
- Spouse did not attend
- Family responsibilities

Focus Group Questions

Focus Group Question-Week #2

Break Out 1	Two of the members did not have this mentor -protégé relationship but one person stated that they always had this person in the church. One participant discussed the importance of the Sunday school teacher and the consistent relationship they had throughout life.
Break Out 2	All the participants in this group had a mentor-protégé relationship. Some said it was a relative, a teacher, or a church member.
Break out 3	One member in this group had this type of mentoring relationship. The others did not have this on-going relationship, but they did turn to people when needed.

Focus Group Question-Week #3

Break Out 1	The group had varied ideas about the church providing food, clothing drives, and training for people to get better jobs. It was also lifted that in the past the church had provided these programs, but the funding is no longer available for many of these programs.
Break Out 2	The church could canvas the community and ask what services are most needed, since we have not been out in a while. This group also lifted the development of a church referral system that could refer people for childcare, utility resources, health care, and create a resource room.
Break Out 3	We need to provide mentoring and after school programs for our young people. Also, what could be provided for our senior citizens. We need this in the church also to create a sense of belonging for newer people.

Focus Group Question-Week #4

Break Out 1	The participants thought about it, and they realized they learned this way when they were young from parents and grandparents. Some members also said they learned this way in the church.
Break Out 2	This group noted that they have been in the church most of their life and this is how they learned how to do their ministries and work in the church.
Break Out 3	There were some in the group who did not relate to the model but felt that having a role model is important if you can find someone. Others stated that they had role models in their families and school coaches but don't know if it was like that model.

Focus Group Question-Week #5

Break Out 1	The niche bible study, small group study, and infinity groups can help a new person decide to join a church. It can also help a person feel that sense of belonging and that they are needed.
Break Out 2	The niche bible study helps bring people who are different together because of interests and common ground. This group talked about other types of studies like Facebook chat and support groups.
Break Out 3	This group felt people just need to come together, share information, build community, and then find out what is meaningful to people.

The focus group discussion served two purposes. It was a well-received opportunity for young adults and the lay leadership to get together, get to know one another on a closer level, and really understand the perspectives of each other. They were very receptive to having these small group conversations.

Spiritual Gifts Assessment

S*piritual Gifts Assessment Results*

Participant	Primary Gift	Secondary Gift	Tertiary Gift	Response to gifts assessment
YAR1A	Miracles	Knowledge	Faith	Agreed with
YAR2A	Wisdom	Leadership	Administration	Agreed with
YAR3A	Faith	Discernment	Knowledge	Agreed with
YAR4A	Miracles	Healing	Faith	Agreed with
YAR5B	Faith	Knowledge	Administration	Agreed with

YAR6B	Faith	Healing	Knowledge	Surprised
YAR7B	Faith	Miracles	Healing	Agreed with
YAR8B	Faith	Administration	Miracles	Agreed with
YAR9B	Miracles	Healing	Servanthood	Agreed with
Total: 9	Faith #1	Healing #2	Administration, Knowledge, and Faith all were #3	

The spiritual gifts assessment was well received, and one participant was surprised by the assessment. The assessment brough to light that there were five out of nine participants who had the spiritual gift of faith as their primary gift. Three out of nine participants had the spiritual of healing as their secondary gift, and the tertiary gifts were tied among faith, administration, and knowledge. It was interesting to see that only one person had a gift of leadership and only one of servanthood. Based on this type of inventory and the gifts being broken down into cluster groups, it confirmed that the participants and the ministry were focused on nurturing, outreaching, and witnessing as they fulfill the mission of the church.

In utilizing these three data points, the participants were able to better understand the multi-layered factors that contributed to young adult dis-engagement. They learned from their focus group discussions and the presented seminar information that these factors range from church ecclesiology, past church hurt, personal issues, financial means, lack of leadership, work related responsibilities, and more. Yet, they are also

more aware of what it is needed in order to develop a model for young adult re-engagement. It will be challenging but not impossible. The seminar provided a means for the participants to look at five types of components that could be added to a developing model: journaling as a means of reflection to deal with the factors impacting our young adults, small groups with discussion to build community and provide belonging, phone app for continuous engagement, niche bible study options, a young adult fresh expression worship service, and practical theology can help us to do the adaptive work to get our model underway. Secondly, some of them learned what their spiritual gifts are for the first time, and they were elated by the fact that they now know their spiritual gifts. For the young adults, this was their first time doing a spiritual gifts assessment and just knowing that you have a spiritual gift and can use it for making a difference in the church brings empowerment. This was confirmation for them for how they are already serving in at the church. Third, from the group's collective spiritual gifts, it confirmed that the church ministry's focus is outward, witnessing, and nurturing. This was based on the cluster group definitions as listed in the inventory. Fourth, the participants already cared about young adult ministry, but I noticed and observed a newfound sensitivity from those attending the seminar as they listened to their voices regarding their experiences, engaged with them on Zoom at the church, and empathized with them in the areas that were challenging. Fifth, from all the instruments utilized, I concluded the hypothesis was confirmed because the lay leadership and the young adult now have a strategy and new relevant ideas for re-engagement. Where some were hesitant in the beginning, they are now ready to meet up and develop the new model. It was clear from the spiritual gifts inventory that it will take all our spiritual gifts to build up the church and community.

Implications for the Future

As I look over this doctoral ministry project, this will be close to my heart because the world is changing so fast, and just like in the Industrial Era and early Progressive Era, people are not thinking about its long-term impact on our youth, children, and young adults. So, there must always be life changing places like churches, the YMCA, Girls Clubs and Boys Clubs, Urban League, the Salvation Army, and so many more organizations that enhance the lives of people. These places equip people in varied ways through programming, structure, teaching life-long values and principles, and providing resources to assist in the whole life of a person. This is what I wanted this project to be for those who are in the church and those who are outside of the church but want to reclaim their place. Embracing the future with great hope for this project, I would love to bring a group of 100 young adults from all over St. Louis and just brainstorm for two days to build a young adult conference and build a smart phone app that can take on this hybrid world the church has embraced. I also would like to publish a book called Engage 4 (standing for engagement to the fourth power, 4 Steps to a second wind for young adult re-engagement). However, my first task is to meet with my leadership council and present the vision, find a coordinator for the young adult ministry, and strategize for creative funding for this new ministry. And I look forward to realizing this vision with the participants in the research study.

In addition to these implications for the future, I would also like to revisit the format that I used, and I still have this desire to meet with this group in person and not for six weeks but perhaps a two-three week time frame. Secondly, my contextual associates and I wanted to have other participants from other churches to get a broader sampling and

greater information on how to develop our new model and better equip the young adults. I am pleased that the hypothesis was proven and that we can move forward in building God's kingdom.

Conclusion

This project has grasped my heart from the very beginning because young adult disengagement seems to be a problem that we have not been able to solve in many of our ministries. But this project has kept me believing that while we may never end this problem, we must always be willing to continue to move the needle and develop new models for the next generation and the next. The essence of this model was meant to be a paradigm shift for the church, meaning to stop looking at our young adult as object and look at them as subjects and co-laborers with us in ministry. The project participants all stated that the young adults can help the church do ministry, can re-ignite the church with new ideas, and can teach us new things that we do not know. When we do the adaptive work that is required for this undertaking, we will see just how much we always needed them front and center in the church and world.

Also, this ministry model endorses the mentor and protégé model not just for the secular world and business affairs, but this is also a must for the church and church leadership. The apostle Paul and Timothy's relationship in the New Testament was so life changing and supportive, I believe, for both. The protégé learns, gleans, emulates, and develops meaningfulness about different aspects of life and leadership. Yet the mentor also has a son or daughter, or confidant, cheerleader, a living testimony of the apostle Paul's great ministry. Paul also provided a young Timothy with spiritual practices or

disciplines to assist him along his spiritual journey and call to leadership. These practices of reading scripture, prayer, devotion, fellowship, and connection with other believers was also a part of this model. Most of the research participants were witnesses to the power of these practices in helping them stay committed to the spiritual walk with God.

Furthermore, the model lifted the need for all of humanity to be in community. God is a relational God, and we are created to be relational. So, building a community where we are all treated as sacred worth and accepting the fact that we all have gifts and something great to bring to the ministry to build God's kingdom is a critical understanding that we all must wrestle with if we are not sure. Lastly, this project and dissertation is about making room for young adults. By stating this, I mean making a place for them at our ministry tables and leadership boards and inviting their input as over fifty percent of the participants stated. I believe this is a call for the church to do a gracious welcome and extend themselves like they have never done before by praying and then by getting busy doing the work of re-engaging these young adults. The way I envision this is we must first reclaim our young adults for the service of God's kingdom work. We do this when we invite them once again to be co-laborers with us and not mere bystanders. Then, we remind them to remember their spiritual heritage and their baptism or God's call for them to be servants for God's work. Third, we then take the challenge and re-engage them in a new and relevant discipleship program just like Jesus re-engaged some fishermen — but this time for his work of fishing for souls. We see how Jesus re-engaged a tax-collector and transformed his life so that his life's trajectory changed and he became a great witness for Jesus. And we see how Peter, who disengaged because he denied Jesus, but on the day of Pentecost was filled with the spirit and re-engaged his call

to discipleship again and became one of the greatest apostles by adding to the church three thousand excluding women and children. Last, once we build on each step of our strategy and do it in the power of the spirit, then we will see signs of revival in the church and community.

APPENDIX A

EVENT FLYER

Christ Community United Methodist Church

****

Presents

"Developing A Ministry Model for Young Adult Re-engagement"

Looking for young adults between the ages of 18-27 and vital church ministry leaders, we need you!

****

Join this 6 Week Re-engagement Seminar!

Dates:

Every Saturday from September 2 through October 7, 2023 (6 sessions)

Time:

4:00-5:15 p.m.

Location:

***Two (2)** In Person Sessions*
September 2nd & October 7th
Christ Community Fellowship Hall
8841 Old Lucas Hunt Road
Jennings, Missouri 63136
(314) 388-1211

AND
***And four (4)** Sessions are Virtual by Zoom*
September 9th ~ September 30th

For Additional Information

Contact: Pastor Michelle @ [redacted]-cell number or email ~revm3@me.com

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Investigator Name: Michelle McClendon McGhee
Contact Information: [redacted] (cell), (314) 388-1211 (church), revm3@me.com (email)

Introduction:
I am a doctoral student at United Theological Seminary. I am part of a fourteen-member cohort group called Innovative Leadership: Building Leaders and Congregations for Effective Change. I began my doctoral studies in the Fall 2021 Semester and anticipate graduating in May of 2024.

Purpose:
I am conducting a study on young adult re-engagement back into the church's discipleship programming.

Requirements for Participation:
You are invited to participate because you are between the ages of 18 - 27 and have disengaged from the church's regular discipleship programming for your age group; or you are a vital lay person (between 40 and up) in ministry at the church who is aware of the young adult disengagement from the church's discipleship programming.

Procedures:
If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to participate in this study by coming to the physical church location for two of the six-week sessions, beginning on Saturday, September 2 and ending Saturday, October 7th in the afternoon. In addition to this, there will be four consecutive Zoom-virtual seminar sessions on Saturday, September 9, 2023, through September 30, 2023, for 1 hour and 15 minutes. Please note the last Session is October 7th and it is in person (like the first session). Participants will also be asked to take home a journal each week and record your reflections on a particular question given each week. (This journal will be turned in on our last session together; complete a spiritual gifts inventory to learn your dominant spiritual gifts and answer the eight questions on a pre- (given September 2nd) and post-test questionnaire (given October 7th) and be actively engaged in the small focus groups.

Human Subject Participation:
All the participants must have consented to be in the study, and participants must be protected and treated fairly throughout the study.

Risks:
The possible risks associated with participating may include re-traumatization of negative events that may have caused one to disengage from the life of the church or caused their children to disengage. Compassion fatigue because we are concerned with this issue and may feel the burden or weight of this fact and how it affects the future of the church.

Benefits:
Young adults would have a sense of belonging, that their voice matters, and that they are vital to the church's witness today. Secondly, that relevant and effective ministry models will form from the information gathered from this collective seminar gathering. And lastly, there will be a greater awareness to the multiplicity of factors that led to disengagement, and this will bring new insight to the leadership of the church, and they will be empowered to build a new young adult ministry program that is more meaningful to this age group (18-26). And the greatest benefit would be young adult re-engaging in the new young adult's ministry model of discipleship thus increasing the number of young adults actively participating in programming relevant to their age group.

Voluntariness:
Participation is voluntary and you may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. You can also stop participating at any time. Your decision to participate will have no impact on (your membership in the congregation or whatever else you think this study may have an impact upon). If something makes you feel uncomfortable in any way while you are in the study, please contact me directly in person, on the phone, at (314) 623-4955 or electronic communication @ revm3@me.com. My contact information is at the top of this consent form. You can refuse to respond to any or all of the questions, and you will be able to withdraw from the process at any time.

Confidentiality:
We will be careful to keep your information confidential, and we will ask you and all the focus group members to keep the discussion confidential as well. There is always a small risk of unwanted or accidental disclosure. The conversations and the focus groups will be recorded and transcribed only with your permission. Any notes, recordings, or transcriptions will be kept private in a locked file case. I will be the only one with access to your information. The files will be encrypted and password protected. You can decide whether you want your name used.

Summary:
If you have any questions about the research study, please contact me. You can also ask your parents any questions you might have about this study

Signature:
Signing this paper means that you have read this, or had it read to you, and that you want to be in the study. If you do not want to be in the study, do not sign the paper. Being in the study is up to you, and no one will be mad if you do not sign this paper or even if you change your mind later. You agree that you have been told about this study and why it is being done and what to do.

Signature of Person Agreeing to Participate in the Project/Study _____ Date Signed _____

APPENDIX C

PRE- AND POST-QUESTIONNAIRE

Pre- and Post-Questionnaire

Principal Investigator: Rev. Michelle McClendon McGhee
Dissertation Research Project Timeline: September 2~October 7, 2023
Developing A Ministry Model for Young Adult Re-Engagement

1) Are you actively (attending 2 out of 4 Sundays) engaged in regular worship attendance? Why? Or why not?

2) What factors do you think have led to your disengagement or to the disengagement of young adults (between the ages of 18-27) from active church attendance and programming?

3) What would you include if you were to create and innovative young adult discipleship ministry to re-engage this group?

4) What spiritual practices have helped you to stay committed to living your Christian life?

5) What individuals within the church, community, or home have helped you along your spiritual journey?

6) Who introduced you to the church?

7) Why are young adults and vital young adult ministry for them so important for this age group?

8) What is your understanding of the body of Christ and spiritual gifts?

APPENDIX D

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Principal Investigator: Rev. Michelle McClendon McGhee
Dissertation Research Project Timeline: September 2~October 7, 2023
Developing A Ministry Model for Young Adult Re-Engagement

Week #2 Focus Group Question

Do you have someone that is like an apostle Paul in your life who has helped you navigate your spiritual journey/maturing as a Christian?

Week #3 Focus Group Question

In all our communities we are seeing a rise in all kinds of crime, homelessness, death of people, and unemployment. What could a church provide that is similar to that (the programming) of the YMCA?

Week #4 Focus Group Question

Now that you have learned the Albert Bandura's Model, when or where have you learned in this way?

Week #5 Focus Group Question

How can a niche Bible study group be meaningful to various groups of people?

APPENDIX E

SPIRITUAL GIFTS INVENTORY

Spiritual Gifts Inventory Statements

Read each statement through twice. Participants should answer what first comes to mind in reaction to each statement (don't "over think" responses). Not every statement fits comfortably with the 7-1 scoring; this is by design to generate greater differentiation. All statements reflect specific reference to the New Testament and the understanding of spiritual gifts in the early church of the first three centuries following the resurrection of Jesus Christ, translated to our modern-day context.

Score sheet

Value: 7-Always, 6-Almost always, 5-Often, 4-Sometimes, 3-Rarely, 2-Almost never, 1-Never

1. I am able to help people make choices and clarify decisions.
2. I am aware of things without having to be told by anyone.
3. I easily delegate authority and responsibility to others.
4. I enjoy sharing my faith with the homeless and impoverished to offer hope.
5. I enjoy teaching the Bible to a small group.
6. I believe that God will help anyone in need.
7. Through prayer, I see God's miraculous work in my life.
8. I do not mind being made fun of for what I believe.
9. I am able to organize human and material resources to serve the needs of others.
10. I enjoy giving money to support the work of God.
11. I like to work with people who are considered by others to be outcasts in their communities.
12. Praying for the sick is a critical part of their healing.
13. I can tell when Christian speakers or groups are being honest and faithful.
14. I listen to others as carefully as I want them to listen to me.
15. I would rather be a secretary in a group than the leader or chairperson.
16. Whenever I share my faith, I ask others to share theirs as well.
17. I help anyone in need, regardless of whether they deserve or appreciate the help.
18. I am ready to counsel people who have spiritual, emotional, or physical problems.
19. I can speak a foreign language fluently.
20. I can follow the conversation of a foreign language I never studied.
21. I am good at seeing many different sides to an issue and helping others see them as well.
22. Things I understand by faith are confirmed by facts, experiences, or information.
23. When I make a decision, I stand firmly behind it.
24. I enjoy being part of ministries that didn't exist before.
25. I am an effective mentor to other Christians.
26. I see God at work in both good times and bad.
27. I am aware of God's miracles every day.
28. Others tell me I am a good public speaker.
29. Working with others to minister to the physical needs of people is more enjoyable than doing the same thing by myself.
30. I have enough money to give generously to important causes.

31. I like to visit people wherever they are - at home, in the hospital, in prison, or in nursing homes.
32. I believe that the healing power of God manifests itself in many different ways, not just in physical healing.
33. I am able to identify the flaw in an argument, idea, or presentation.
34. I learn best when I can discuss what I read in Scripture and share insights and ideas with others.
35. I am good at attending to the 'busy work' that others tend not to enjoy.
36. An invitation to Christian discipleship should be extended to people whenever they gather to worship or study.
37. I give practical, material assistance to those who are in need.
38. I will work hard to support any group that is fully committed to a good cause.
39. Foreign languages are easy for me to learn.
40. I intuitively understand the meanings of most foreign words and phrases.
41. Others are surprised by the depth of my understanding and the integrity of my advice.
42. I am good at sensing other people's moods and concerns just by being with them.
43. I am effective at organizing projects for ministry.
44. I desire the opportunity to be a missionary.
45. I feel a strong responsibility to point out dangerous or erroneous teachings to others.
46. I pray for people who have lost their faith.
47. I believe that God works miracles through the faith of Christian believers.
48. I find practical applications to real world situations when I read the Bible.
49. I find it easy to ask for help from others for worthy projects.
50. I feel a strong desire to give money to Christian ministries.
51. I want to help as many people as I can, regardless of the reason for their need.
52. I pray for healing for the sick and afflicted.
53. I know when a preacher or speaker is accurately presenting the gospel or spiritual teaching.
54. It troubles me when people are misled or persuaded by inaccurate, biased, or false messages about the Christian faith.
55. I give whatever time and energy is needed to finish a project or meet a deadline.
56. I feel comfortable sharing the importance of Christian belief with non-Christians.
57. 1 prefer working in the background rather than in the spotlight.
58. I am patient and tolerant of others who are less mature in their spiritual development.
59. I communicate easily with members of other races, cultures, or generations.
60. I understand and easily accept the values, behaviors, and interests of generations other than my own.
61. When others seek out my counsel or advice, I am confident that what I say will be helpful and valuable.
62. People are surprised by how well I understand them.
63. I offer good leadership to a project or group.
64. It is easy for me to share my faith with people from other cultures and foreign lands.
65. I strive to create harmony and unity whenever I am part of a group.
66. I trust in the promises of God, even when they are improbable or unlikely.
67. I feel the power and presence of God's Holy Spirit when I pray.
68. My faith gives me the courage to speak out, even to those in positions of authority.

69. I design and plan strategies for ministry both in and beyond the church.
70. I know whether or not an appeal for money is legitimate.
71. My compassion for others often takes precedence over my own personal needs.
72. I participate in the healing of others through prayer.
73. I intuitively sense elements of truth or error in other people's teachings.
74. I enjoy creating lessons, classes, and projects that illuminate and illustrate biblical truths.
75. Pastors and other key church leaders seek my opinions and advice on important issues.
76. I feel comfortable talking about my faith in non-Christian settings.
77. I make sure that everything runs as smoothly as possible.
78. People are willing to listen to what I say because they understand that I have their best interests in mind.
79. I communicate well with everyone, no matter how different from me they might be.
80. I am able to interpret what someone says to others who do not understand.

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Spiritual Gifts Inventory Key and Definitions

1. Wisdom	11. Compassion
2. Knowledge	12. Healing
3. Administration	13. Discernment
4. Apostleship	14. Teaching
5 Shepherding	15. Helping/Assistance
6. Faith	16. Evangelism
7. Miracles	17. Servanthood
8. Prophecy	18. Exhortation
9. Leadership	19. Tongues
10. Giving.	20. Interpretation of Tongues

Administration - the gift of organizing human and material resources for the work of Christ, including the ability to plan and work with people to delegate responsibilities, track progress, and evaluate the effectiveness of procedures. Administrators attend to details, communicate effectively, and take as much pleasure in working behind the scenes as they do in standing in the spotlight.

Apostleship the gift of spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ to other cultures and to foreign lands. Apostleship is the missionary zeal that moves us from the familiar into uncharted territory to share the good news. Apostles embrace opportunities to learn foreign languages, visit other cultures, and go to places where people have not had the opportunity to hear the Christian message. The United States of America is fast becoming a mission field of many languages and cultures. It is no longer necessary to cross an

ocean to enter the mission field. Even across generations, we may find that we need to "speak other languages" just to communicate.

Compassion— the gift of exceptional empathy with those in need that moves us to action. More than just concern, compassion demands that we share the suffering of others in order to connect the gospel truth with other realities of life. Compassion moves us beyond our comfort zones to offer practical, tangible aid to all God's children, regardless of the worthiness of the recipients or the response we receive for our service.

Discernment —the ability to separate truth from erroneous teachings and to rely on spiritual intuition to know what God is calling us to do. Discernment allows us to focus on what is truly important and to ignore that which deflects us from faithful obedience to God. Discernment aids us in knowing whom to listen to and whom to avoid.

Evangelism —the ability to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with those who have not heard it be-fore or with those who have not yet made a decision for Christ. This gift is manifested in both one-on-one situations and in group settings, both large and small. Evangelism is an intimate relationship with another person or persons that requires the sharing of personal faith experience
and a call for a response of faith to God.

Exhortation —the gift of exceptional encouragement. Exhorters see the silver lining in every cloud, offer deep and inspiring hope to the fellowship, and look for and commend the best in everyone. Exhorters are not concerned with appearance; they hold fast to what they know to be true and right and good.

Faith — the exceptional ability to hold fast to the truth of God in Jesus Christ in spite of pressures, problems, and obstacles to faithfulness. More than just belief, faith is a gift that empowers an individual or a group to hold fast to its identity in Christ in the face of any challenge. The gift of faith enables believers to rise above pressures and problems that might otherwise cripple them. Faith is characterized by an unshakable trust in God to deliver on God's promises, no matter what. The gift of faith inspires those who might be tempted to give up to hold on.

Giving— the gift of the ability to manage money to the honor and glory of God. Beyond the regular response of gratitude to God that all believers make, those with the gift of giving can discern the best ways to put money to work, can understand the validity and practicality of appeals for funds, and can guide others in the most faithful methods for managing their financial concerns.

Healing-the gift of conducting God's healing powers into the lives of God's people. Physical, emotional, spiritual, and psychological healing are all ways that healers manifest this gift. Healers are prayerful, and they help people understand that healing is in the hands of God. Often their task is to bring about such understanding more than it is to simply erase negative symptoms. Some of the most powerful healers display some of the most heartbreaking afflictions themselves.

Helping the gift of making sure that everything is ready for the work of Christ to occur. Helpers assist others to accomplish the work of God. These unsung heroes work behind the scenes and attend to details that other would rather not be bothered with. Helpers function faithfully, regardless of the credit or attention they receive. Helpers provide the framework upon which the ministry of the body of Christ is built.

Interpretation of Tongues (see also Tongues) the gift of (1) the ability to interpret foreign languages without the necessity of formal study in order to communicate with those who have not heard the Christian message or who seek to understand, or (2) the ability to interpret the gift of tongues as a secret prayer language that communicates with God at a deep spiritual level. Both understandings of the gift of interpretation of tongues are communal in nature: the first extends the good news into the world; the second strengthens the faith within the fellowship.

Knowledge the gift of knowing the truth through faithful study of Scripture and the human situation. Knowledge provides the information necessary for the transformation of the world and the formation of the body of Christ. Those possessing the gift of knowledge challenge the fellowship to improve itself through study, reading of Scripture, discussion, and prayer.

Leadership the gift of orchestrating the gifts and resources of others to accomplish the work of God. Leaders move people toward a God-given vision of service, and they enable others to use their gifts to the best of their abilities. Leaders are capable of creating synergy, whereby a group achieves much more than its individual members could achieve on their own.

Miracles —the gift of an ability to operate at a spiritual level that recognizes the miraculous work of God in the world. Miracle workers invoke God's power to accomplish that which appears impossible or impractical by worldly standards. Miracle workers remind us of the extraordinary nature of the ordinary world, thereby increasing faithfulness and trust in God. Miracle workers pray for God to work in the lives of others, and they feel no sense of surprise when their prayers are answered.

Prophecy —the gift of speaking the word of God clearly and faithfully. Prophets allow God to speak through them to communicate the message that people most need to hear. While often unpopular, prophets are able to say what needs to be said because of the spiritual empowerment they receive. Prophets do not foretell the future, but they proclaim God's future by revealing God's perspective on our current reality

Servanthood the gift of serving the spiritual and material needs of other people. Servants understand their role in the body of Christ to be that of giving comfort and aid to all who are in need. Servants look to the needs of others rather than focusing on their own needs. To serve is to put faith into action; it is to treat others as if they were Jesus Christ. The gift of service extends our Christian love into the world.

Shepherding the gift of guidance. Shepherds nurture others in the Christian faith and provide a mentoring relationship to those who are new to the faith. Displaying an unusual spiritual maturity, shepherds share from their experience and learning to facilitate the spiritual growth and development of others. Shepherds take individuals under their care and walk with them on their spiritual journeys. Many shepherds provide spiritual direction and guidance to a wide variety of believers.

Teaching the gift of bringing scriptural and spiritual truths to others. More than just teaching Christian education classes, teachers witness to the truth of Jesus Christ in a variety of ways, and they help others to understand the complex realities of the Christian faith. Teachers are revealers. They shine the light of understanding into the darkness of doubt and ignorance. They open people to new truths, and they challenge people to be more in the future than they have been in the past.

Tongues (see also Interpretation of Tongues) the gift of (1) the ability to communicate the gospel to other people in a foreign language without the benefit of having studied said language (see Acts 2:4) or (2) the ability to speak to God in a secret, unknown prayer language that can only be understood by a person possessing the gift of interpretation. The ability to speak in the language of another culture makes the gift of tongues valuable for spreading the gospel through-out the world, while the gift of speaking a secret prayer language offers the opportunity to build faithfulness within a community of faith.

Wisdom—the gift of translating life experience into spiritual truth and of seeing the application of scriptural truth to daily living. The wise in our faith communities offer balance and understanding that transcend reason. Wisdom applies a God-given common sense to our understanding of God's will. Wisdom helps us remain focused on the important work of God, and it enables newer, less mature Christians to benefit from those who have been blessed by God to share deep truths.
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APPENDIX F

FOCUSED JOURNALING QUESTIONS

Focused Journaling Questions

1) A young adult would like to have a place/space in the Church that is their gathering place. Yet all the rooms are taken and the person begin to list all the room and what takes place in them. How would this response have made you feel, and from your view, what might they have considered saying?

2) If you were to take a picture of your church you attend or disengaged from, who would be in the picture? Why does the picture look this way?

3) When you were younger, what piqued your interest and kept you fulfilled and busy?

4) Person Y loved helping people on the job but couldn't quite home in on what or who to help her at the church. If you were Y's friend, who would be your recommendations to get person Y started?

5) What factors in your life hindered you from participating in church activities or programs?

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